Pit Closures in Northumberland: A Study of Bates Colliery

Thesis

UNRESTRICTED

PIT CLOSURES IN NORTHUMBERLAND

A STUDY OF BATES COLLIERY

(The decline of the Northumberland Coalfield. An historical and socio-economic study with special reference to the closure of Bates Colliery, Blyth.)

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THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Northumberland Coalfield and its subsequent decline. It looks at the closure of "uneconomic pits", with particular reference to the social effects. As a case study of a pit closed on these grounds, Bates Colliery in Blyth, Northumberland has been chosen to focus in detail on closure. This has been achieved by describing and analysing a Study and the development of a Campaign to oppose the closure. The thesis then expands again to encompass the subsequent increase in opencast mining in Northumberland and social effects.

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Sources outlined on Figures.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis the author examines the Northumberland coalfield in its entirety. The scene is set with a chapter on pre-history and the geological conditions that laid down the foundation of the story. The second chapter moves us through history into the nineteenth century and the early working and living conditions of miners and their community. Maps and charts that plot the development of the coal mines from the late nineteenth century to the present time are accompanied by historical detailed information on "cavilling" traditions and working arrangements that link the past with today's sense of a miner's unique "community spirit" and philosophy of life.

Much of the historical information was gathered at the Northumberland Records Office in Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, and the author had to dig deep to find the relevant material. Much of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century records were still covered in soot from the Pit offices of the day, and their blazing coal fires! This historical data is given to illustrate and portray the pit-village community life and to see the traditional values and practices carry forward into the later in-depth study of Bates Colliery closure.

The historical perspective set the scene for the later 1947 Nationalisation changes, which were highlighted by manpower figures and details of pit closures in Northumberland to the present time. These tables were collated by the author from various sources and

have never been listed as such before. The politics and philosophies of the N.C.B. can be traced in parallel with the coalfield's gradual decline. The graphed peaks and troughs of closure reveal that Nationalisation gave only a brief respite to the 20th Century rundown of coalmining in Britain until the oil boom in the mid 1960's. This led to a further contraction of the industry, because coal was no longer regarded as an economic fuel. A brief look at the proposed nuclear industry in the area was considered relevant here.

It was considered important by the author to examine closely the question of what is "uneconomic" as regards pit closure as this issue was so central to the 1984/5 Dispute and the arguments given by the N.C.B. for the numerous pit closures.

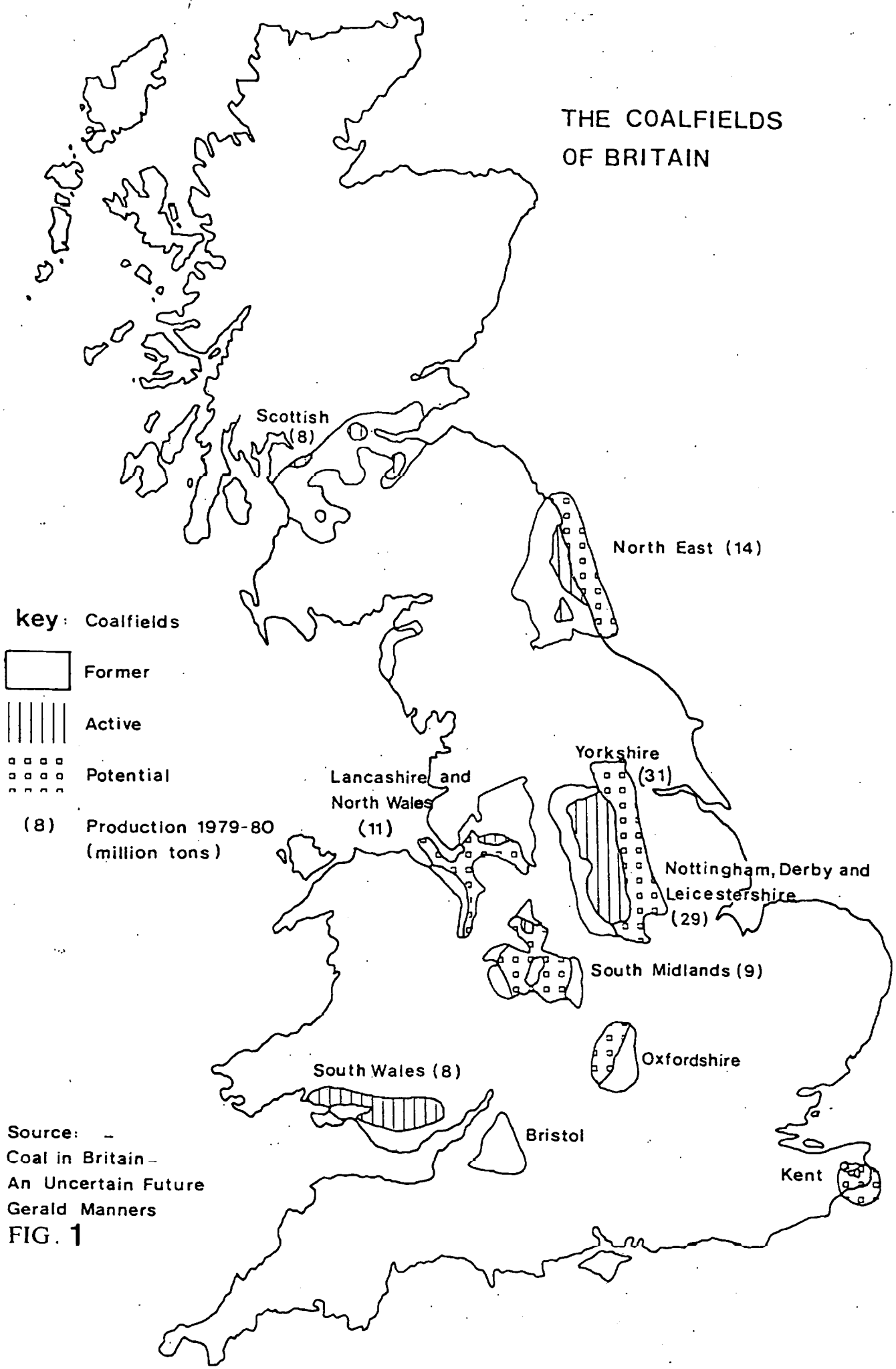
This brings us to the main body of the Study which focuses on the closure of Bates Colliery, Northumberland from the perspective of the author's involvement in the Save Bates Campaign as a Research Assistant for the Open University, helping Dr. E. Wade compile "Coal Mining and Employment - A Study of Blyth Valley" 1985. During that year the data of the research was often required at very short notice by Blyth Valley Council, and it could be called "action research" in every sense of the word. The meetings, Conferences and delegations are set out in detail, with the intention of recreating some of the feverish atmosphere and high emotion of the time. The analyses of the questionnaires also demonstrates how the miners feel, and cope when the basis of solidarity and community is threatened and taken away. These findings are discussed with reference to studies on "Occupational Communities" and other studies on Pit Closures.

The story moves on to the Independent Review Body hearing in 1986 which again raised and dashed hopes in a very short time, causing violent swings of emotions for those closely involved. The Study tries to balance human stories and issues with the analytical data available; thus linking the reality of the situation for the miner with the academic and research material of the observer.

Finally, the Study is brought up to the present time examining the increase of opencast mining and decline of deep mining in Northumberland, since the closure of Bates Colliery and the consequences of employment and environmental damage.

CHAPTER ONE

GEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



Source: –
Coal in Britain –
An Uncertain Future
Gerald Manners

FIG. 1

Coal began as vegetation.

Virtually all British coal, was alive and growing some two to three hundred million years ago, during what geologists call the Carboniferous Period. Most of what is now Britain was under water. There was land to the north and south, from which rivers brought down their silt of mud and clay, depositing it into a huge, shallow lagoon that covered the area between. As the silt piled up, swampy land emerged and soon giant tree-ferns and other vegetation were covering it with a thick, sub-tropical growth.

Sunlight falling on the leaves and stems of this sub-tropical vegetation, set in motion the process from which all plants derive their life and substance. Taking its energy from the sunlight, the green chlorophyll in the plants acted on the carbon dioxide gas of the air, extracting and keeping the carbon while returning the oxygen to the atmosphere round it. The roots meanwhile drew up water from the swampy soil. Hydrogen was extracted from the water, and combined with the carbon to form carbohydrate, an energy-giving substance on which the plants relied for their growth and activity.

The coal-swamp vegetation's dead remains sank into the oozy mud and their chemicals were sealed from the air before they had time to decompose. Layer upon layer of decaying wood and leaf-litter piled up and sank, going on for a few million years. Then the

earth's crust under the swamp heaved and shifted and subsided a little. The sea streamed in, and the swamp became once more a shallow lagoon. The rivers from the higher land brought down their mud and clay, and covered the sunken stratum of rotted plants with mineral layers, until the level rose again, and a new forest-swamp appeared.

This cycle of events continued for the better part of a hundred million years. One after another the layers of dead matter and silt above it were laid down, forming what are now known as Coal Measures. The Carboniferous Period was brought to an end by a big upheaval that changed the pattern of the map. Britain became solid land, and much of what had been land became sea. New layers of rock and soil formed over the Coal Measures. Plant life adapted itself to the drier conditions and in these islands no more coal was formed. See Fig.1.

The sinking of the Coal Measures below the surface, and the forming above them of new strata, subjected the vegetable remains to great pressure and heat. What began as a layer of rotting matter was eventually compressed to a solid seam of coal one-twentieth its original thickness. The conversion was gradual. At first the disintegrating mass was loosely consolidated into soft peat. As the pressure increased, the fabric packed tighter and became harder, forming what is known as lignite, or "brown coal". Little by little the lignite was compressed into a rock-like substance, and its colour changed from brown to black. It was now true coal, hard, though still easy to split - "bituminous" coal, as it is called. Under further

pressure it became anthracite, which is very hard and composed almost entirely of carbon.[1]

All these different forms of the same substance are gathered and used today. All have their uses, though the greatest concentration of energy lies in the hardest coal, although some sub Anthrasitic coals have a higher value. In most of the British coalfields, the thickness of the Coal Measures is from 2,000 to 3,000 feet. Within this extent there may be as many as a hundred separate seams of coal. Many of these, however, will be no thicker than a few inches and are not worth the cost of extraction. A thickness of one foot is generally considered the minimum for economical working. In present circumstances seams below 90 cms. are not considered worth extracting.

In the course of thousands of millions of years, the stirring of molten masses in the earth's hot centre has many times changed the shape of things on its surface. Together with the rocks above and below them, the Coal Measures have been folded and buckled and broken. Miners are lucky if their seam lies level. More often they find themselves working up the "rise" or down the "dip" of a sloping seam. Elsewhere, uneven pressure has cracked the earth's crust right through, and moved the two edge-surfaces of the crack out of line with one another, so that the strata are no longer continuous at that point. This is called a "fault". When the seam they are working comes to an abrupt end against a face of rock, they know that it has been faulted, and must be looked for again above or below its old level.

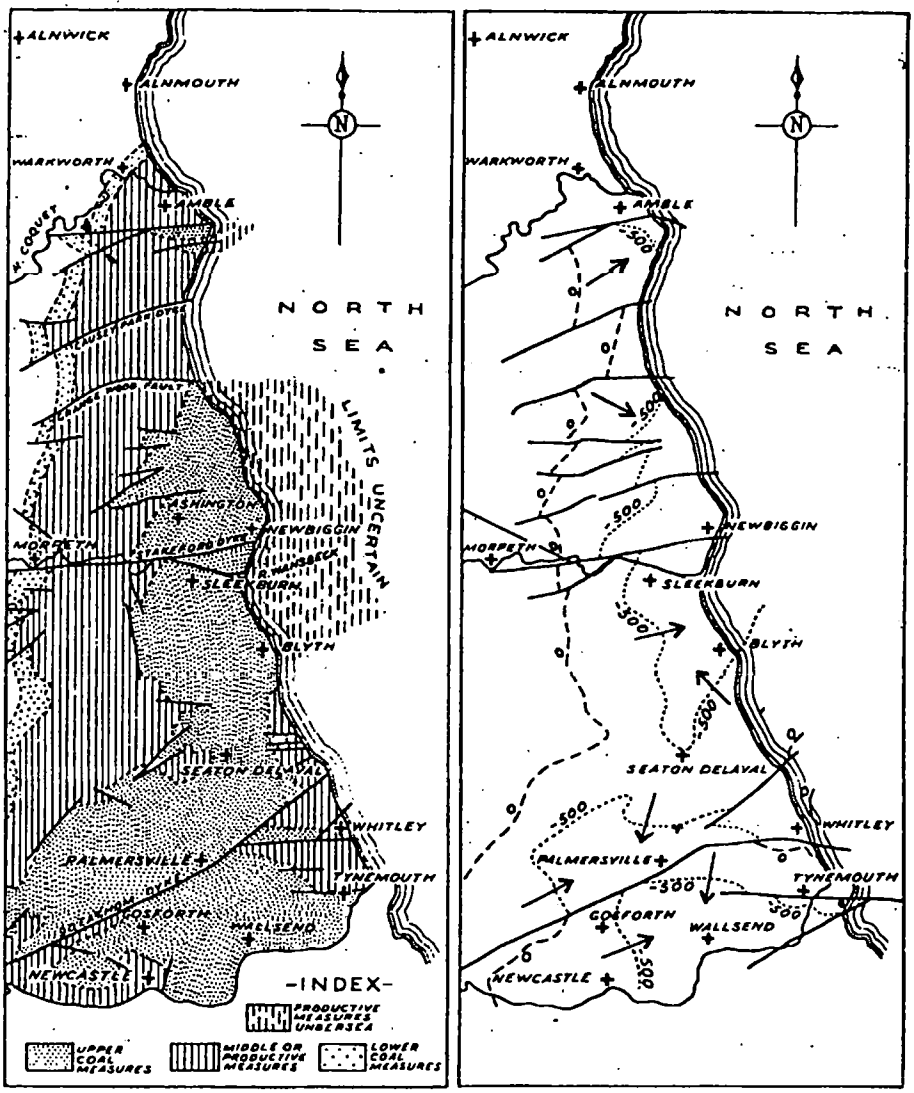
Where the buckled or folded rocks are thrust up into a ridge of mountains, the softer strata above are worn and washed off the slopes in the course of time. Thus a hard ridge may push through the Coal Measures and divide what was once a single coalfield into two. On either side of the ridge, the coal seams will be tilted upwards. Their broken edges rise to the surface, and are covered only by the shallow soil that has collected above them. In such a place, there is no need to sink a shaft below before mining can begin. Here and there, where sea or river has worn cliffs in the hills, the ege of a coal seam is exposed to the open air. This is called an "outcrop" and formed the earliest form of mining namely "Opencast".

GEOLOGY OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND COAL MEASURE SEAMS AND THEIR RESERVES

Although coal in one form or another is to be found all over Northumberland (except the Cheviot Hills which are granite) - the main field, containing all the best seams, is confined to the south-east. Therein lie the Coal Measures proper, disposed in a triangle based on the Tyne, and with its apex at Amble. This area is, in reality, the northern half of a single great coalfield, shared with Durham. (See Fig. 2)[3]

The stratas are arranged in three groups - an upper one, mostly sandstone, with coals few and of poor quality; a middle one or Productive Measures, with one or two thin seams and the Lower Coal Measures and much sandstone, some of which is pebbly and in that respect reminiscent of the underlying Millstone Grit.

As the coalfield broadens to the south, undulating folds develop. The cover of Upper Coal Measures never attains any great thickness, so that even in the deepest part, in the Wallsend trough, the High Main Coal, at the top of the Productive, is not more than 750 feet underground. Faults are numerous and there are three major displacements; 1. the Hauxley Fault of about 1,000 feet throwing out all the chief seams in the far north; 2. the Stakeford Dyke Fault 500 feet across the centre of the field, and 3. the Ninety-Fathom Dyke Fault, at the south end, running out to sea south of Whitley Bay (see Fig.3).



Source: Ministry of Fuel and Power.
Regional Survey Report. (Northern "A" Region 1945)

FIG. 2

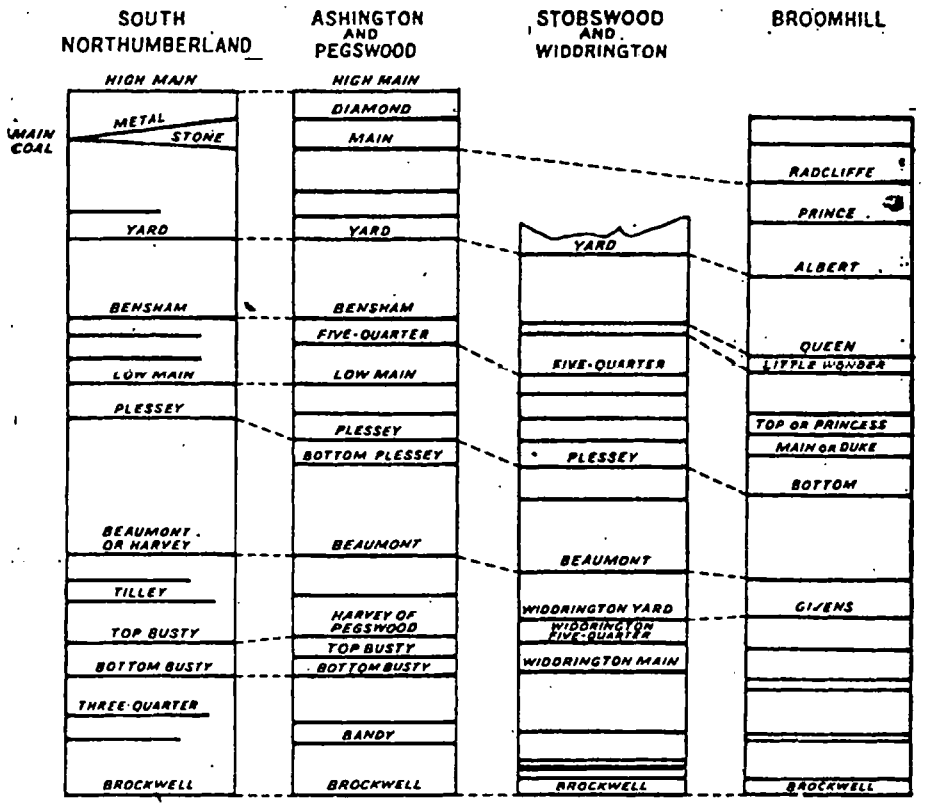
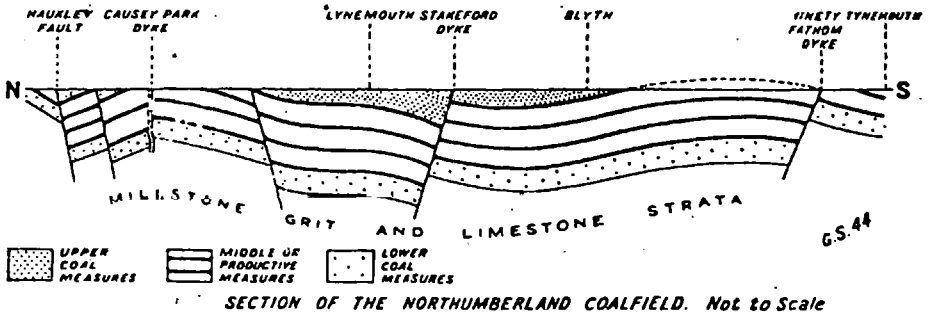


Fig. 2 PRODUCTIVE COAL MEASURE SEQUENCES IN NORTHUMBERLAND

G.S. 44



G.S. 44

SECTION OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND COALFIELD. Not to Scale

Source: Ministry of Fuel and Power.
Regional Survey Report. (Northern "A" Region 1945)

FIG. **3**

Other dykes of quite a different kind are the vertical fissures filled with intrusive whinstone, burning the coals on either side; examples are the Acklington Whin Dyke (not a fault) at Broomhill, and the Causey Park Dyke (a dyke and a fault) further south; two around Blyth and again at Seaton Delaval, with a small one on the coast at Tynemouth.

In Northumberland steam and gas coals are the general rule. In the past the Tyne largely made its reputation on such high-lying seams as the High Main, Bensham and Low Main, and throughout the field the upper half of the Productive Measures is usually the best. Within the last few decades the most valuable seam has been the Yard, a first-class house-coal, perhaps the best of its kind in the North of England. Most of the seams, generally speaking, are better at or near their western outcrops, and incline to thin down and develop dirt or stone partings when followed eastwards. Besides the usual local "wash-outs" common to coal seams everywhere, there are areas of impoverishment, irregular in outline, but at times several miles wide and extending right across the field. In South Northumberland where the seams are relatively thin, this is a serious matter, for a fall of a few inches may bring the seam below the accepted 1 foot limit of workable thickness; (although the historical figure from the 1905 "Coal Census" was in fact 1ft.5ins.) as much as two-thirds of the available area may be lost in this way (e.g. in the Top Busty and Three Quarter Coals). However, there still remains considerable reserves to be worked, dependent upon the definition of seam extractability; size; technology and economics.

To establish the extent of offshore resources and the future pattern of development at individual collieries along the coast, a drilling programme took place between 1958 and 1965, to prospect for coal under the North Sea. Since then, £15 million has been spent on further exploratory drilling from specially-adapted ships. In 1985 £3 million was spent on drilling a series of boreholes to a depth of 610 metres below the sea bed. They confirmed at least 200 million tonnes of new reserves lying between five and fourteen kilometres off Westoe Colliery, South Tyneside.[4]

However, is a resource a reserve or vice versa? 200 million tonnes of resources could be converted into reserves and eventually mined. Maybe!

References/Notes - Chapter One

1. TOMALIN M. (1969) "Coal Mines" Methuen P.8

2. MANNERS G. "Coal in Britain - An Uncertain Future". Fig.1.

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CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Prehistoric men, living near outcrops, must certainly have chanced on the discovery that the pieces of black rock tumbling down from the hill would burn.

The systematic collecting of coal did not begin however, until there was sufficient industry to need it. The first people to mine coal in any organised way appear to have been the Chinese. By the first century A.D., they were working coal underground in shallow but well-constructed mines.

Throughout their extensive empire, and particularly in Britain, the Romans must often have encountered coal outcrops; but theirs was not an industrial civilisation, and they never made more than incidental use of coal. Some was quarried along Hadrian's wall, and used for fuel and smithying. There is evidence that coal was brought by barge to Roman settlements in the Fenlands, where wood was not so abundant and coal was easier to transport. Country gentlemen of Roman Britain sometimes used coal in the under-floor heating systems in their villas.

Early records show that by about 1200 A.D., monks in Scotland and the north of England were quarrying outcrop coal to feed their iron forges. The use spread more widely then, to lime-burners, saltmakers, brewers, washers and dyers.[1] In the course of the thirteenth century, the British coal industry established itself. By the end of the sixteenth century, its importance was

fully recognised. Other industries came to depend on British coal, and have done so until now.

Though coal was quarried from early times in all the major British coalfields, the easily accessible outcrops in the banks of the River Tyne gave Newcastle the lead. In 1239, Henry III granted a charter to Newcastle citizens to dig for coal in fields round the town. Already by the end of the century, Tyneside monks were exporting coal in coastal ships to London and towns in the south.[2]

In those days, houses had no chimneys. Smoke from the hearth was left to find its way out through a hole in the roof. Coal smoke, gathering in the rooms, filled them with unpleasant fumes. For this reason only those people who could not afford wood burned coal in their homes. However, timber was getting short and growing numbers of householders were forced to make use of the new fuel. The result of that was the invention of the chimney - one of the first of many improvements to which coal gave rise. Brickmakers, glassmakers, and potters were finding the value of coal in increasing their production and extending their trade.

The growing demand for the new fuel encouraged more men to mine it and to improve the methods by which it was mined. They tunnelled into the hill following the dip of the coal seam, or dug down through the surface soil until the coal was found. Pit mines of this sort are first heard of in Britain in the 15th Century. At this stage they were very shallow. A coal mine was as deep as the height of a modern 3-storey house. The 15th Century pit-miner climbed into his pit by way of a ladder, and hewed out the coal from the seam

round the bottom of the shaft. Rather than risk a sudden fall of earth by cutting under too far, he sank another pit a few yards away and began again. A longways cross-section of such a pit would therefore have shown a narrow neck splayed out at the bottom. From their shape, these primitive mines came to be called "bell-pits". The tunnels that were driven in horizontally from the outcrop faces in the hills were called "adits" or "drifts".

PROGRESS IN THE NORTH

As early as the 14th century, Tyneside was exporting a small quantity of coal to France in return for grain, though their main trade went coastwise to the south of England and was commonly called "sea-coal". Queen Elizabeth I taxed its sale. She and her successors found it an extremely profitable source of income. The total national output, which before the 16th century had never been higher than 7,000 tons in one year, had multiplied some thirty times by the middle years of Elizabeth's reign.

Drifts and bell pits were the normal methods of coal-mining up to the early 17th century and the days of the first Stuart kings. Only in the North-East coalfields did anyone venture more deeply. In the coalfields of Northumberland and Durham, which for three or four centuries were ahead of any others, a few pits reached a depth of 100 feet in Tudor times.

The difficulty and cost of carrying coal for long distances overland made it impossible for inland centres outside the coalfields to make full use of it until the system of canal transport spread over the country in the late 18th century. Before that time enterprising

industrialists were forced to move their workshops into the districts where coal was produced.

The possession of coal resources gave the Newcastle colliery-masters a great power, and they showed it in Charles II's reign, when Parliament tried to regulate their prices. They replied by closing their pits for the summer, which left London in a desperate state of shortage the following winter. London's retaliation was to spread rumours of the discovery of new coal deposits in Windsor Forest. The rumours were false, but they forced the Newcastle men to re-open their pits.

INDUSTRY EXPANSION

On Tyneside the scale of production was already outrunning the capacity of the old bell pit system. The answer to that was to burrow further inbye, and extract more coal from each pit. "Inbye" is the miner's term for the direction into the ground, away from the pit bottom. Bord and pillar mining was developed - this was a method of leaving pillars of coal standing at intervals in the working place, and extract only the coal that lay in the space. Eventually when the limit of coal royalty was reached, the men would retreat, taking out the pillars "taking out brockens".

As the industry expanded during the 17th Century, a less wasteful method was evolved in the Shropshire coalfield, which came to be known as "longwall" mining. Coal was cut by a team of hewers working side by side at a long coalface. The narrow working space, running down the length of the face, was supported by timber props. As the work advanced farther into the seam, the

props were moved up, and the empty space behind them filled in and left to subside. Both methods were used in Shropshire and Northumberland, but Shropshire tended to favour the Longwall method and Northumberland tended to favour the Bord and Pillar method.[3]

Throughout the 17th century, miners in the later collieries were digging steadily deeper to meet the demand for coal. When the century ended, the biggest mines in the Newcastle area had reached a depth of 400 feet. A hundred years later 3 pits in Northumberland approached 800 feet. By the year 1700, miners in a fair-sized Durham pit would be hewing coal 150 yards inbye from the pit bottom.

Ponies were first used in drift mines in the 17th century, and were introduced in larger pits in the early years of the 18th century. One effect of the introduction of ponies below ground was the employment of small children to drive them. This was the beginning of a practice which became a serious evil in the century which followed.

CHILD EMPLOYMENT

The public outcry which followed the publication of the report from Commissioners inquiring into child employment in the coal mines, brought legislation in 1842. This law elevated the age of entry to the mines to ten. It prohibited entirely the employment of women and girls and made provision for the appointment of inspectors to go underground and examine the workings.

The Great Northern Coalfield (as Northumberland and Durham was called) emerged badly from the report, published in two volumes, and was

especially condemned for its exploitation of boy labour. It was redeemed only by the discovery that of all the coalfields, the North was alone in not employing women and girls. The practice had died in the latter half of the eighteenth century, following the death of a woman in a shaft accident at Fatfield, Co. Durham.

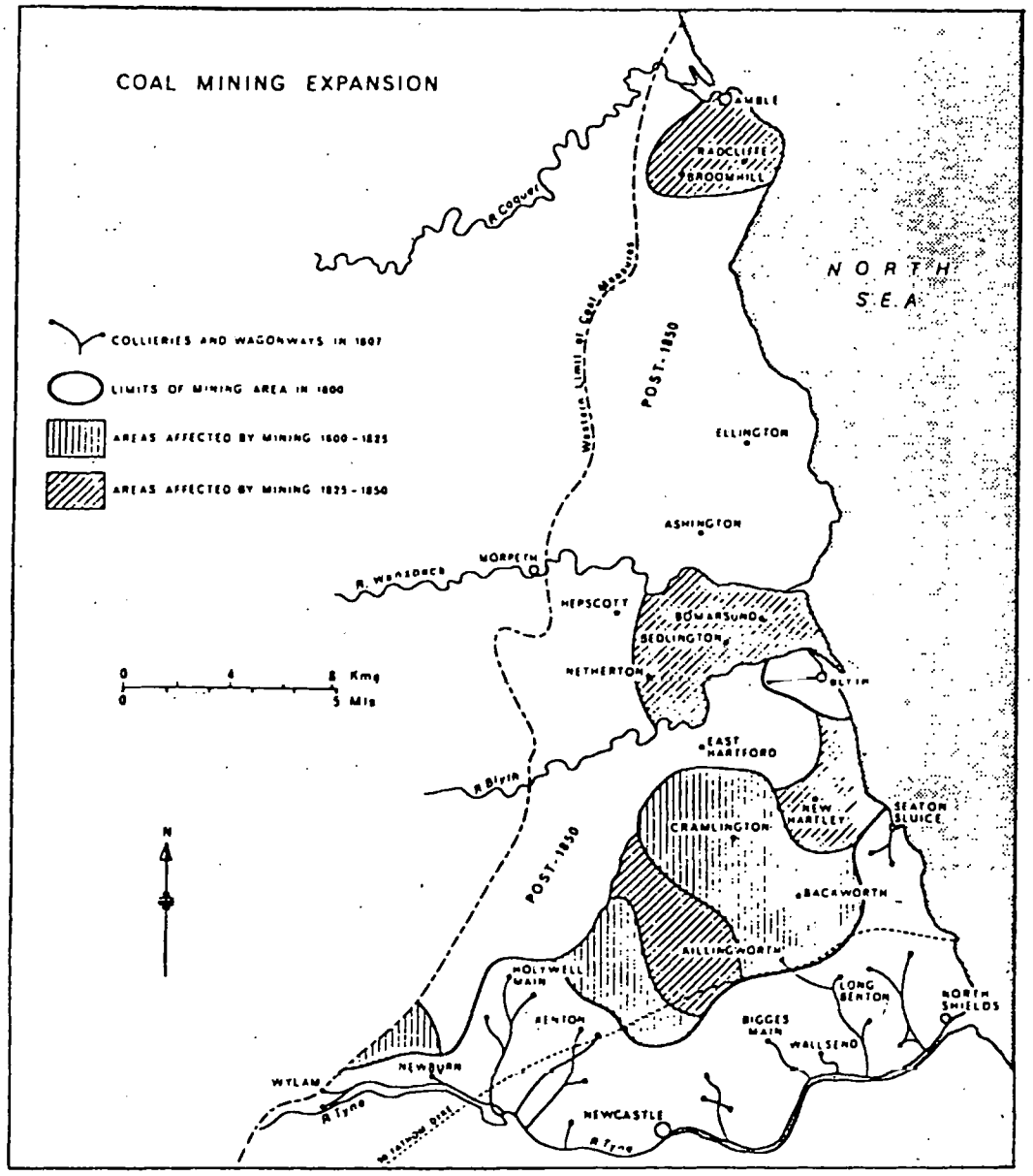
EXPANSION (See Fig. 4)

Coal became a catalyst for commerce, providing huge profits for financiers, who by this time were eager to finance the sinking of more and more pits. This expansion continued throughout the eighteenth century with coal production in Britain leading the world. The demand for more and more coal led to new technological developments such as the steam engine and subsequently the railways. Britain became fully industrialised with vast steel, iron and coal industries. By the close of the nineteenth century Britain's annual output was 147 million tons.[5] In just half a century the demand for coal resulted in its becoming the most important industry in Britain, and the men who mined it were becoming politically and socially one of the most important sections of the British working class.

DEATH AND INJURY

This industrial success was won at a very high cost. Death and injury were commonplace in the mining industry. Hobsbawm[6] tells of 1,000 miners being killed annually between 1856-86, with disasters frequently occurring where hundreds died (e.g. High Blantyre 1877 - 200 dead; Haydock 1878 - 189 dead; Ebbw Vale 1878 - 268 dead; Seaham 1880 - 168 dead). This was due to

mineowners disregard for the safety and health of their workers. Their families too were at the mercy of unscrupulous mineowners, living in the unsanitary villages built by them.



Coalmining Expansion

Source: Northumberland Records Office, Newcastle upon Tyne.

FIG.4

UNIONISATION

These conditions eventually led to the unionisation of miners and their subsequent organisation to fight for improvement in wages and working conditions. Trade unionism in the mining industry came about because of the bitter relationship between miners and mineowners and followed a history of ruthless strike breaking and oppression, and was eventually achieved, with national unity by 1912.

The situation in Northumberland and Durham after a disastrous strike in 1832 saw the miners dispirited and leaderless. It seemed that there was no way of escaping the oppressive measures of the coal owners. On April 5th, 1844 the miners of Northumberland and Durham refused to sign the annual bond unless the coal owners agreed to redress a number of outstanding grievances. The latter refused to negotiate and a strike was called. The owners responded by bringing into the area "black leg" workers from Wales and Cornwall. Amidst scenes of violence and destruction, men of the 64th Militia Regiment were called to assist the poice while "candy men" were employed under the protection of the law to evict strikers' families from their homes.

Everyone, regardless of age or state of health was driven outside; every article of furniture and personal belongings thrown into the gutter, and doors and windows boarded up. Amidst the shrieking, crying and "tinpanning" of women and children, and the curses and scuffles of their men, the whole community was heartlessly evicted whilst soldiers and police stood by and protected the "candy men".

This scene was to be repeated in many mining villages throughout the area. The strike dragged on until, finally, the miners were starved into submission and returned to work on the old terms. There was no work for the leaders. They were blacklisted throughout the North and were forced to emigrate or move to other parts of the country.

In 1862 came the Hartley Disaster when 204 men and boys died. This tragic event brought about a national interest in the mining industry and the national press began to put forward the case for change in the safety regulations governing collieries. In 1863 the Northumberland and Durham Miner's Association was re-formed and another attempt was made to establish a National Association of Miners. In the following year, at a delegates' meeting held at Plessey, Thomas Burt, as representative of the Choppington Pit, proposed that Northumberland Miners should secede from the Durham group, and this was carried out. On July 15th 1865 he was elected Secretary of the Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association which had a membership of 4,000. It was a difficult time at which to take over, for the Cramlington Miners were on strike and the funds of the Association were low, there being only £23 at the time. By his efforts, external aid flowed into the Association and when the strike ended the Funds stood at £700. This sum, on Burt's advice, was made the nucleus of a central fund, which very soon amounted to £20,000, whilst membership increased to almost 16,000 men and boys.

The General Election of 1874 resulted in the first "working man" MP being elected - for Morpeth in Northumberland. The new M.P. was Thomas Burt, leader of the Northumberland Miners' Association, and in

order to win, his first battle was to obtain the vote for miners of the constituency.[7] (See Fig. 5)

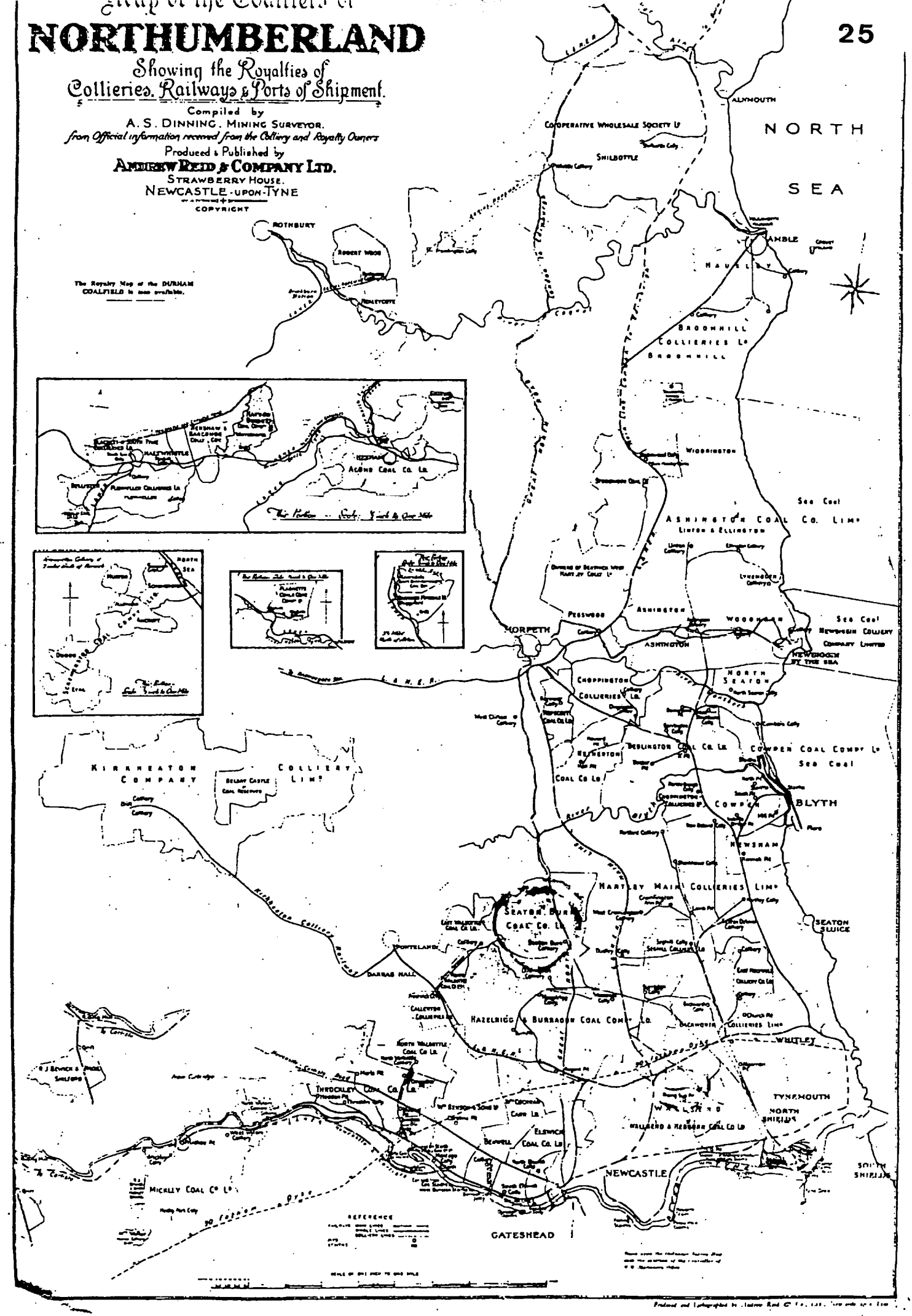


FIG. 5

Source: Northumberland Records Office, Newcastle upon Tyne.

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CHAPTER THREE

BEFORE MECHANISATION

Several concepts and traditions regarding work roles and group relations have emerged from single place working in Northumberland and Durham which are important for a clearer understanding of more complex mining systems, plus the development of the characteristic socio-ethnic community culture. The most important are the ideas of the composite, self-supervising workman, the self-selecting "marrow" group, and the equitable sharing of workplaces - "cavilling".

The composite work role had less common application than Bord and Pillar and Longwall in Northumberland but developed as a response to the demise of those systems. It can be described as follows:

It begins with breaking-in to the coal face and continues with hewing (winning) and loading the coal into tubs, while roof supports are set at intervals prescribed by regulations (bord). When the face has been advanced a distance agreed among the group who occupy the work place, the stone in the floor is taken up and built into packs, and rails are then laid to allow the tubs to approach the coal face. This cycle of operations is not governed by a time schedule. Work proceeds in a continuous manner, each successive shift taking up the cycle at the point left by the previous shift. A single place worker must, therefore, possess the necessary range of skills to carry out all face tasks, for sooner or later he will be required to do them all.

The collier supervised himself and was the person directly

responsible for production. The composite work role which derived from the technological requirements of single place working established the tradition and reality of faceworker autonomy.[1] However, technology took over.

THE MARROW GROUP

The primary work group - the marrow group - is comprised of men[2] who share the same paynote through working the same place either on the same or different shifts. (fore-shift, backshift and in some pits - night-shift). In winning places where two men are on together there will be six in the group in a three-shift pit, and three for bord places where only one man is on at a time, or two if there are only two shifts. These groups select themselves, the men choosing marrows or mates of the same standard in work performance as themselves. Account is taken of an individual's capacity for physical effort, his skill as a workman, the standards of performance he sets for himself, his known pattern of attendance, his age, etc. Because men of like capacity tend to work together, the earnings of marrow groups vary widely, even for the same work place. The existence of marrow groups gave the Northumbrian face-worker great experience in handling relations in the small group. It developed from the vagaries of work place allocations in the Bord and Pillar system.

CAVILLING

Further rules concern the equitable sharing of work places so that every group has an equal change of working in good and bad conditions. This is known as **cavilling**. All work places, except development headings, were pooled every quarter and drawn by lot

in a formal ceremony at which both management and union lodge were present. Numbers (representing a working position) were put in a drum, and another drum holding the men's names, were drawn out simultaneously. Sometimes a man would draw a good position, sometimes a bad. Very rarely would they get the same place twice. This system was highly adaptive to single place working since there were a large number of places and wide differences between them, which directly affected earnings. In practice, cavilling did not always ensure equal sharing of the good and bad, but it did ensure a randomness of allocation that provided a safeguard against favouritism and victimisation. The cavilling rules of a pit form a kind of case law which built up over the years. The continuance and meticulous enforcement of these rules were insisted on by the union. For the names of seams See Fig.6.

SUPERSTITION

On Cavilling day the pit-men's wife would put the cat into the cooled oven or the coal-house until the cavils had been drawn for good luck.[3]

DEMISE OF CAVILLING

Cavilling was first challenged in Northumberland by Major A.M. Morison from Broomhill Colliery who wrote a paper on 26.5.1932 entitled "Machine Mining and Cavilling.[4] He suggested that "because of the periodical changing of places whereby a workman finds himself displaced from one seam and from one system of working to another seam, possibly with different characteristics and an entirely different system of working requiring special

training; because of this it cannot be expected that a workman subject to these changes can become so efficient as one who specialises for the whole of his time on one particular job, and is trained in detail to it." He put foward the idea that cavilling reduced efficiency in modern machine mining, because the pits had become too large to constrict working in marrow groups with seam status, and therefore cavilling mixed up all types of workmen and prevented a team spirit, and periodically changed trained for untrained men.

In August 1932 at Broomhill Colliery the following Cavilling rules were issued:-[5]

Cavilling in Machine Mining

1, 2 & 3 The fillers at present working on conveyor faces should remain there, but in the case of additional conveyor faces to be started, applications would be received from the hewers and fillers who formed themselves into groups of the requisite numbers for the purpose. In the event of there being more sets than are required, they would be cavilled.

4 Failing mutual agreement, men would be cavilled away.

5 If a set of conveyor fillers was out of place owing to it having been stopped, the set would have the first claim to the next new face started. If no new face was started before the ordinary hewers and fillers cavilling then they would be cavilled.

6 The men should marrow themselves.

7 All the ordinary hewers and fillers at the colliery who have marrowed themselves in groups, according to the number required, should be allowed to tender. The colliery custom to apply that the lowest or any tender not necessarily accepted.

8 Present custom at the colliery to apply.

9 Extra Joint Committee Rule:-
Some provision should be made in regard to the wages question in the case of a set of men working for a considerable time under adverse conditions as an alternative to the cavilling system.

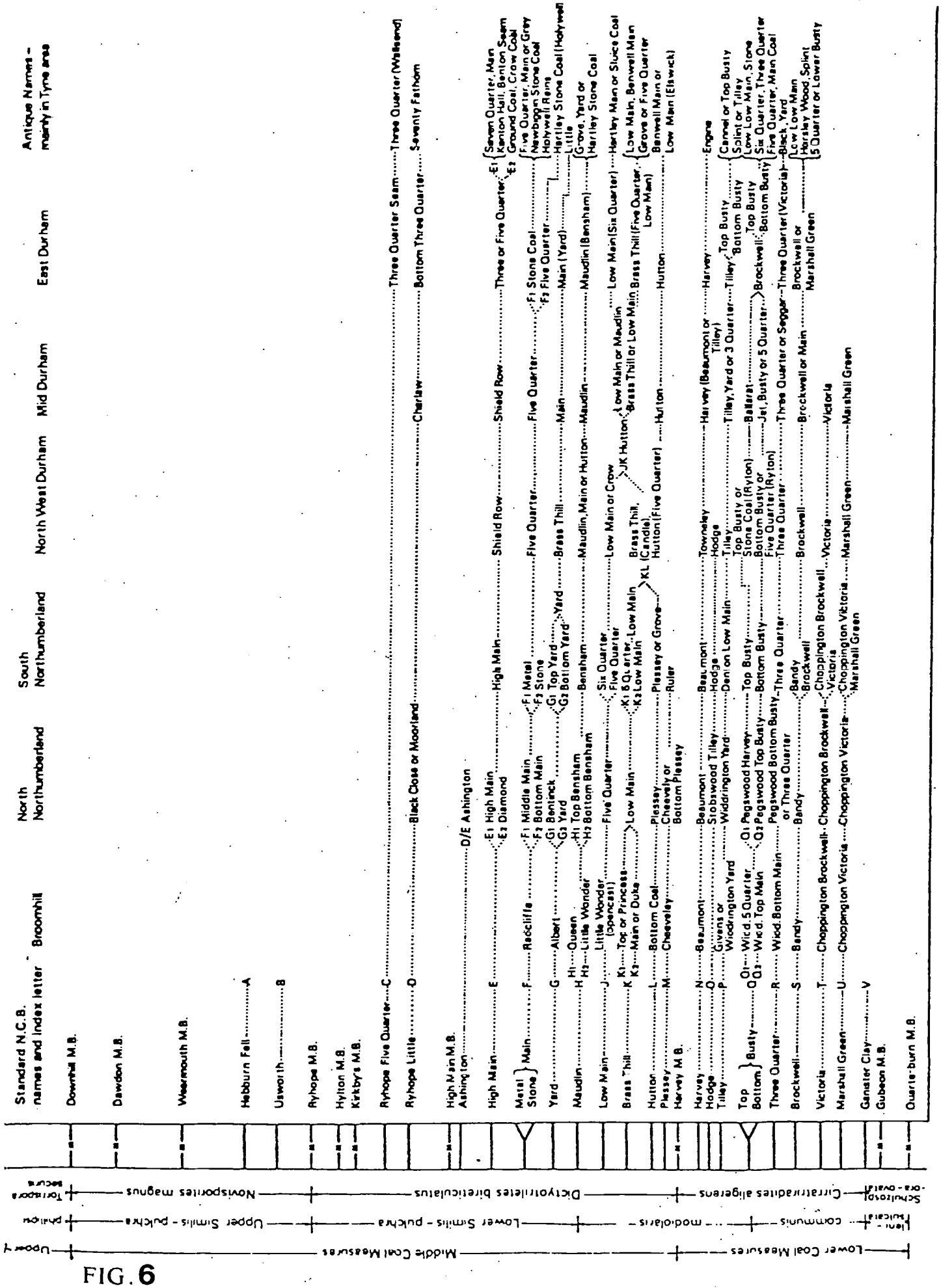


FIG. 6

Source: Ministry of Fuel and Power.
Regional Survey Report. (Northern "A" Region 1945)

This new cavilling agreement demonstrates the decline of the system which A.M. Morison proposed and although cavilling was still used failing mutual agreement, the size of the pits had outgrown its usefulness. However, the customs and rules produced a seam group which was a highly organised and stable population. This organisation and stability did not stem from the management; they arose from formalisation of the customs of the working group of which the lodge was the guardian.

MINING VILLAGES AS A COMMUNITY

Northumberland mining villages did not always exist as mining communities. They were built up as a community of miners quite deliberately by the coal company which sank the original pit. It was a "constructed community"[6]. Geographical isolation, traditionalism, a suspicion of strangers, great solidarity among the men and a clear sense of Us and Them can all be found. Tight bonds of kinship, the clear separation of the roles of men and women, and occupational homogeneity are some of the characteristics of the typical mining community described by Martin Bulmer (1975)[7].

The special circumstances of capital investment in mining required the creation of villages and communities, rather than camps, as happened in the U.S.A. Through their unions and co-operative societies they built their own institutions distinct from those of the coal company. Through family and kinship they built defensive walls against chance and circumstance, constructing a way of life which was theirs and not simply a reflection of the coal company's plans.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BROOMHILL COLLIERY

Broomhill Colliery, near Amble in Northumberland was sunk in about 1773, much earlier than most of the pits in this area. Broomhill, together with several other small villages and hamlets, comprise the Parish of Chevington. Broomhill is sometimes described as Amble's "main artery" and the development of its small port is certain to be due to the development of Broomhill Colliery. In 1873 the Pit belonged to Messrs. Sowerby and Andrews, and all the housing was deemed to be of the "improved" type. The original village is in two parts; one situated near the colliery proper and the other is half a mile distant to the south on the same road, and in both cases the sanitary conditions were better than most villages in the area.

All the houses in the village were made of white brick, the clay for which was taken from the colliery. School Row consisted of two-roomed houses. The upper room, which was the same size as the kitchen below, had a fire-place. Broomhill Terrace was made up of twelve four-roomed houses, the "pride of the village".[8] All the workmen who could not get housing in Broomhill itself lived in Amble, or in South Broomhill. The housing here was not as good as in Broomhill, as many of the kitchen floors were laid with large flat bricks, and water seeped up between them in the winter. This caused disease. In the latter part of the 18th Century Broomhill Colliery had for many years the "folk-law" record of drawing more coals from one shaft per working day than any other colliery in the world. Another noteworthy incident was that only on very rare occasions a stranger was taken on at the colliery, the men and women of the village keeping up the supply! In 1875 the daily output of 1000 tons of coal rose to 2000

tons. This was thought to be due to the services of J.H. Merivale, Professor of Mining at Durham College of Science who instituted many improvements in the Pit. In the year 1900 Broomhill Colliery was sold together with Radcliffe Colliery and were then known as "Broomhill Collieries Ltd."[9]

The following "Sunday Times" article dated 17.2.80[10] shows the demise of the housing in East Chevington, a nearby village to Broomhill, and how the community have had to adapt to the decline of the Northumbrian coal-field. (See Fig. 7)

David Liddle

East Chevington — the Northumbrian village made by coal and now destroyed by coal

Goodbye, East Chevington

THE VILLAGE of East Chevington, thrown together by Victorian coal owners to house Northumberland drift miners is the sort of community generally presumed to have vanished from post-war Britain.

Four rows of 285 terraced houses straggle through open fields down to the North Sea, their poker-straight lines exactly echoed by 285 outside lavatories and coal sheds which stand across the concrete lanes.

The vast majority of the houses have no hot water, no baths, no wash basins; nor any phones, indoor sanitation or privacy. Their occupants are nearly all related, all are dependent on coal and many have spent their entire lives in this two-shop village.

The last improvements were made to the Chevington homes in the mid-Fifties when water pumps and ash toilets were superseded by elementary plumbing. The National Coal Board, which by then owned it, considered major alterations unnecessary, since it had only a short life. "Short" in this instance meant a quarter of a century. The drifters, as the men are locally known, are only now being rehoused and it will be April before all 1,000 villagers are resettled in the largest population shift the NCB has ever undertaken.

The impetus for East Chevington's demolition has come from the seam which brought it into being. Under the empty fields around it, and untouched by the old Chevington Drift mine, lie 3m tonnes of good industrial coal lusted after by the NCB's open cast executive.

The loss of the entire village and its sub-standard housing is a positive bonus to the Board, trying hard to rid itself of inherited tied housing. Castle Morpeth borough council is delighted to add more than 300 homes to its council house stock, especially as the EEC has chipped in with a £1m loan. The council has already started a £5m resettlement scheme at Hadston, a few miles to the north.

But, among the drifters, enthusiasm is strangely lacking when, on the face of it, they can only gain from swapping three elderly rooms and a scullery for centrally-heated homes, often boasting two lavatories, poised in lush landscaped grounds.

The trouble is that the move has thrown the people from the kind of life that elsewhere died after the First World War straight into today's selfish and materialistic world.

East Chevington was thick with community spirit. The people could hardly avoid it: "When you went to the toilet, you could see all the way up and down the terrace, you always spoke to people," says Mrs Yvonne Henschall, who married a drifter 14 years ago.

From the village, people could walk in a few minutes to the beach, part of the magnificent 10-mile sweep of Druridge Bay and everywhere in East Chevington you could hear the sea. Fishing was therefore another important part of village life — many families had boats and collected lobsters from home-made pots.

Garden sheds are not allowed on the new estate and that means nowhere to make the lobster pots. For drifters like Ned Douglas, an inveterate spare-time fisherman, the move has been disastrous. "He just sits and reads the paper now," says his wife Hazel, "He doesn't know what to do with himself." And other villagers, accustomed to a life-time without any mod cons, have also found the adjustment hard to make. When the first new homes were filled 18 months ago, Councillor Joe Smith, who has moved to the new estate, was besieged by old people scared of the baths and unable to work the coal-fired central heating.

But, for some, East Chevington's obsolescence was not so picturesque. In the old houses, three or more teenagers might share a bedroom and bath nights meant taking turns in a tin tub in front of the sitting-room fire. "We had rows every Sunday," says one ex-resident.

No one, though, is complaining about the new rents. Some families have been offered four-bedroom houses at the heavily-subsidised rent of £2 a week. The NCB refunds the difference (and pays removal costs) to the council and will go on doing so for up to 20 years to wean drifters from the short-term perks of tied housing.

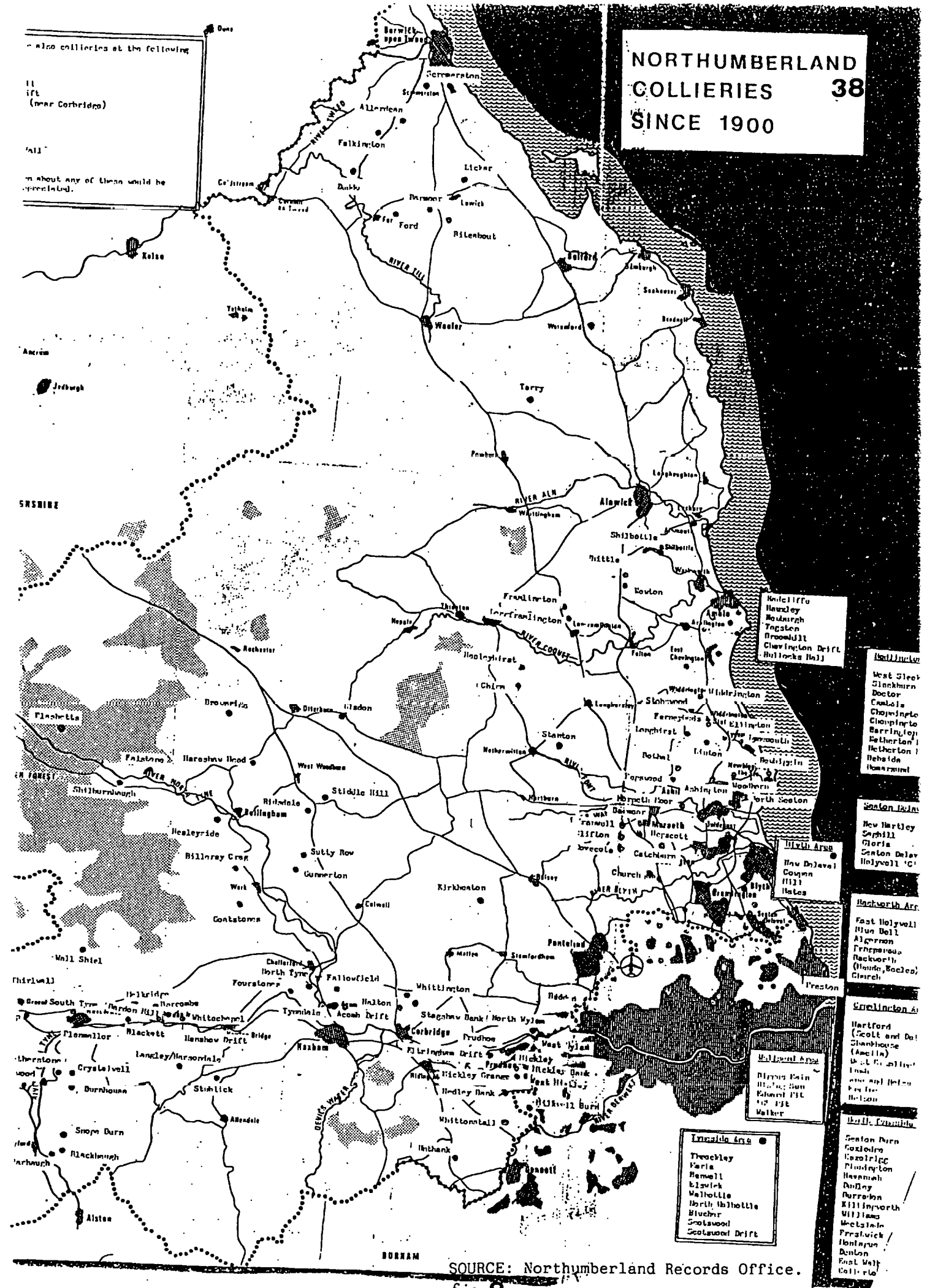
Of course, the sub-standard houses had to make way for the mine but it now emerges that the terraces may be supplanted by an even more unwelcome presence. The Central Electricity Generating Board seems interested in Druridge Bay as a site for a nuclear power station and one of the two coastal areas it is currently testing for suitability extends to East Chevington.

So, at best, the drifters will see their homes and fields submerged in mud and drag lines; at worst, their new Parker-Morris standard homes will be in the front line of a nuclear power station, possibly a TWR. It is hardly surprising there is nostalgia for the old simple life.

Chris Tighe

EXPANSION

In 1913, the output of British coal reached a total of 287 million tons over the year, a figure that has never been equalled before or since. This expansion in the coal industry continued until the first world war, when production began to fall, mostly because of the reluctance of mineowners to invest in modernisation of their pits. This, together with the emergence of international competition (previously inconsequential) began Britain's decline as the world's main coal supplier. (See Fig. 8)


NORTHUMBERLAND
COLLIERIES 38
SINCE 1900
Berwick upon Tweed
Scremerston
Allerdean
Falkington
Licker
Lewick
Ford
Kelso
Wooler
Belford
Seahouses
Alnwick
Shilbottle
Rothbury
Jedburgh
Morpeth
Ashington
Blyth
Newbiggin
Bedlington
Stakeford
Choppington
Cramlington
Seaton Delaval
Whitley Bay
Tynemouth
North Shields
Wallsend
Newcastle upon Tyne
Gateshead
Hexham
Corbridge
Prudhoe
Ryton
Blaydon
Consett
Stanley
Chester-le-Street
Durham
Sunderland
Hetton-le-Hole
Houghton-le-Spring
Washington
Whickham
Crawcrook
Haltwhistle
Alston
Brampton
Longtown
Carlisle
Penrith
Keswick
Cockermouth
Workington
Whitehaven
Maryport
Wigton
Silloth
Appleby
Kirkby Stephen
Barnard Castle
Richmond
Scotch Corner
Darlington
Stockton
Middlesbrough
Redcar
Saltburn
Whitby
Scarborough
Filey
Bridlington
Driffield
Beverley
Hull
Goole
Selby
York
Harrogate
Ripon
Northallerton
Thirsk
Malton
Pickering
Helmsley
Kirkbymoorside
Scarborough
Whitby
Guisborough
Saltburn
Redcar
Middlesbrough
Stockton
Darlington
Richmond
Leyburn
Hawes
Sedbergh
Kendal
Windermere
Ambleside
Grasmere
Keswick
Cockermouth
Workington
Whitehaven
Maryport
Wigton
Carlisle
Brampton
Haltwhistle
Hexham
Corbridge
Prudhoe
Ryton
Blaydon
Gateshead
Newcastle upon Tyne
North Shields
Tynemouth
Whitley Bay
Seaton Delaval
Cramlington
Stakeford
Bedlington
Newbiggin
Blyth
Ashington
Morpeth
Rothbury
Alnwick
Shilbottle
Wooler
Belford
Seahouses
Berwick upon Tweed
Scremerston
Allerdean
Falkington
Licker
Lewick
Ford
Kelso
Jedburgh
Hawick
Selkirk
Galashiels
Melrose
Jedburgh
Kelso
Coldstream
Duns
Eyemouth
Berwick upon Tweed
Scremerston
Allerdean
Falkington
Licker
Lewick
Ford
Kelso
Wooler
Belford
Seahouses
Alnwick
Shilbottle
Rothbury

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CHAPTER THREE

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CHAPTER FOUR

DECLINE OF THE INDUSTRY

Between the wars there was high unemployment in mining. In 1932 34% of all coalminers in Britain were unemployed.[1] The industry had contracted as a whole as Britain became less competitive in world markets, due not only to recession, but also to the collapse of the coal export trade and lack of expansion in domestic consumption.

In 1913 Britain had produced 25% of the world's coal and 55% of world exports. By 1937 these figures had dropped to 19% and 40% respectively. Domestic consumption in 1913 was 184 million tons and in 1937-8 had only reached 185 million tons.[2] Pits had become steadily less efficient, and the coal produced less competitive in quality and price. The owners tried to counteract this by further reductions in miners' wages and increased working hours. This had culminated in the strikes of 1921 and 1926, which were unsuccessful when other unions failed to support them.

NATIONALISATION

Through seven centuries of development, the British mines had remained in private hands. Now the scale of mining had become too large for private owners to develop on their own resources. During both world wars government control of mines and coal production gave the miners the idea that nationalisation was the only way to bring about a return to the previous prominent position of the coal industry. Only a nation-wide organisation was thought to be able to save the industry.

On the first of January, 1947, the British mines became national property, after the General Election 1945 brought about the return of a Labour Government, who had pledged nationalisation. The blue flag of the National Coal Board was hoisted at all British pits with more than 25 employees below ground. Those with less remained Licenced Mines under private ownership. Work began at once on the immediate necessities, but full-scale reconstruction awaited the appearance in 1950 of a detailed plan for British coal.

REORGANISING THE INDUSTRY

The new plan called for an expenditure of £635 millions in a period of fifteen years, at the end of which time the country would be producing about 240 million tons of coal a year. This, it was calculated, would correctly meet both the country's own needs and the demand likely to be made from abroad.[3]

One of the reorganisations was to stop the inefficient system of honeycombing one small area with many small pits. It would be more economic to use one pair of shafts and to mine the whole area from one central point. Ninety existing pits were to be absorbed in concentration schemes of this kind - nearly one-tenth of the total number at that time. Many pits were to be reconstructed and twenty new collieries constructed on a large scale, each producing up to 6,000 tons a day.[4]

Far reaching proposals were made for the mechanisation of all aspects of work underground. Not only the cutting of coal but the whole sequence of events from coal face to pit bank were to be

brought up to date. The old rope haulage systems were to be replaced by locomotive haulage and belt conveyors. In all new pits, men and materials would travel to and from the working districts behind mine locomotives powered by diesel engines, electricity or compressed air.

THE RECOVERY DECLINES

The recovery in the industry which had started in the late 1930's continued for the first decade after nationalisation. However, by the late 1950's cheap middle eastern oil began to pose a serious threat to the coal industry's traditional markets and steadily increased its share of the domestic fuel market until the early 1970's. This, together with a government policy aimed at keeping domestic coal at a very cheap level at the N.C.B.'s expense was said, by the National Union of Mineworkers to have been the Government's intention by reducing the demand for coal and giving priority to oil. The political and economic power of oil interest, they claimed, had a part in this. The N.U.M. warned of possible dangers of rundown of the coal industry and of complete reliance on oil, which they saw as:

[5] [6]

> "The product of areas throughout the world, many of which are politically unstable .... A political crisis could be quickly transformed into fuel scarcity" [7]

The Government disregarded these warnings and between 1956 and 1974 two thirds of manpower, three quarters of collieries and

half of the output of the coal industry was lost (See Fig.9).

In 1960 Northumberland lost 29 pits and Durham lost 75, together with 73,000 jobs.[8]

NORTHUMBERLAND

To see exactly how the Northumbrian Coal Field had declined since 1947, Library Research was carried out by the author, to compile a Table that would delineate Manpower and Closure dates.[9] (See Figs. 10, 11 and 12). The Tables demonstrate that over 80 mines became nationalised in Northumberland in 1947 with over 43,000 jobs. This has reduced to only one pit still operating in 1992 - Ellington with 1963 jobs. The serious rate of decline came after 1960 when 50 pits remained in Northumberland which still provided nearly 36,000 jobs.

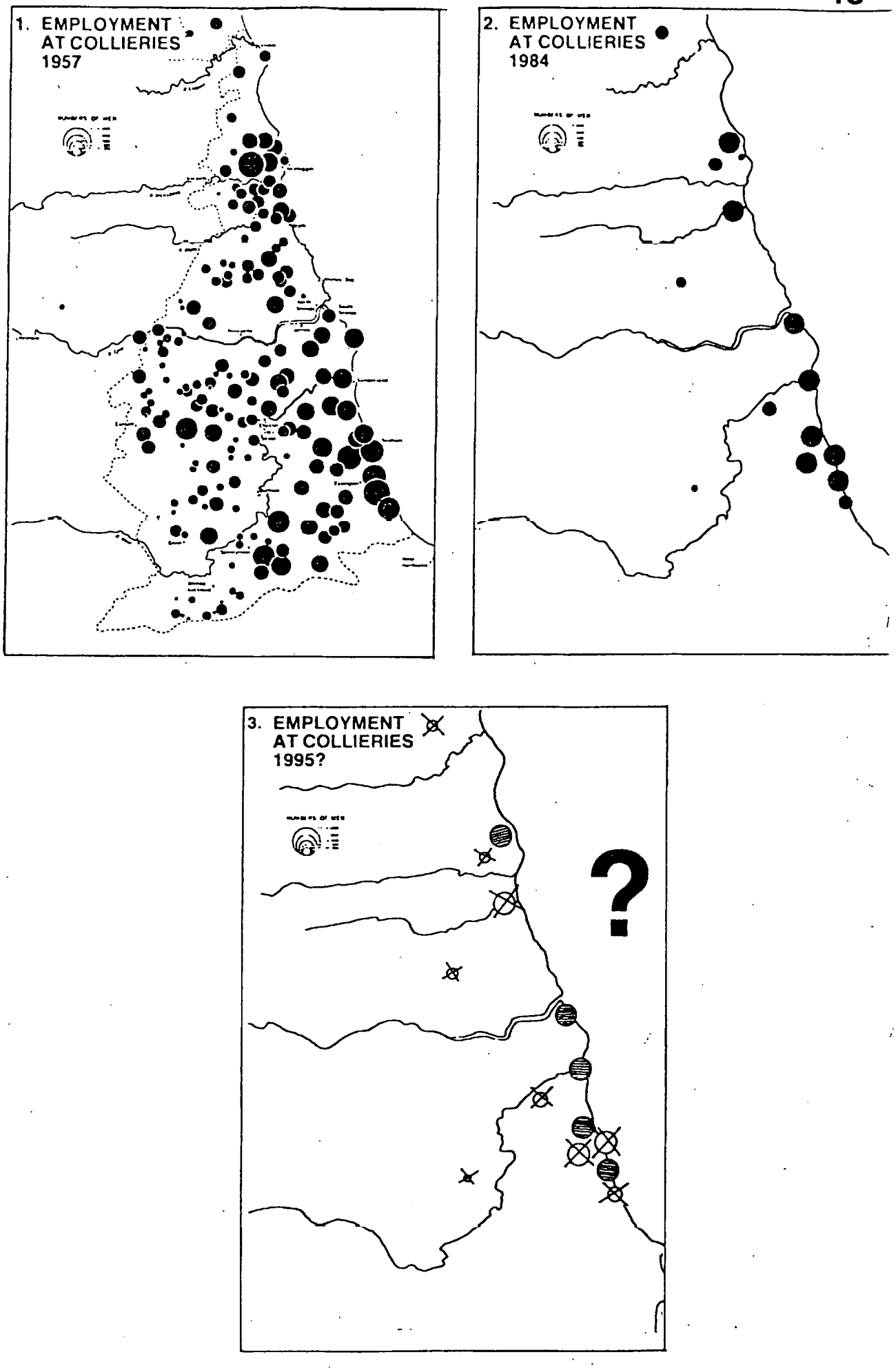


FIG. 9

EMPLOYMENT AT COLLIERIES IN THE NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM COALFIELD

Source: "Coal Mining & Employment. A Study of Blyth Valley. Eric Wade"

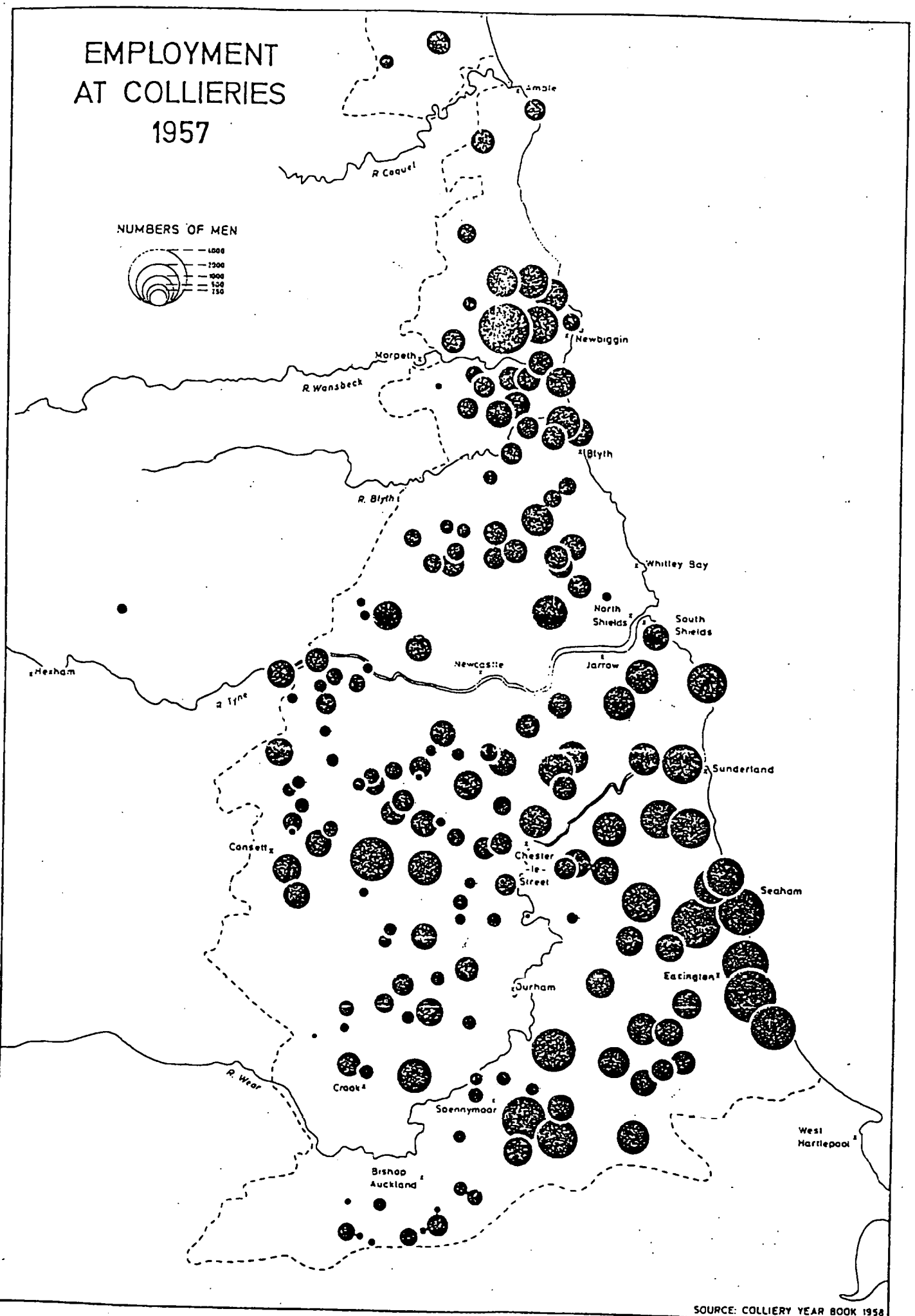
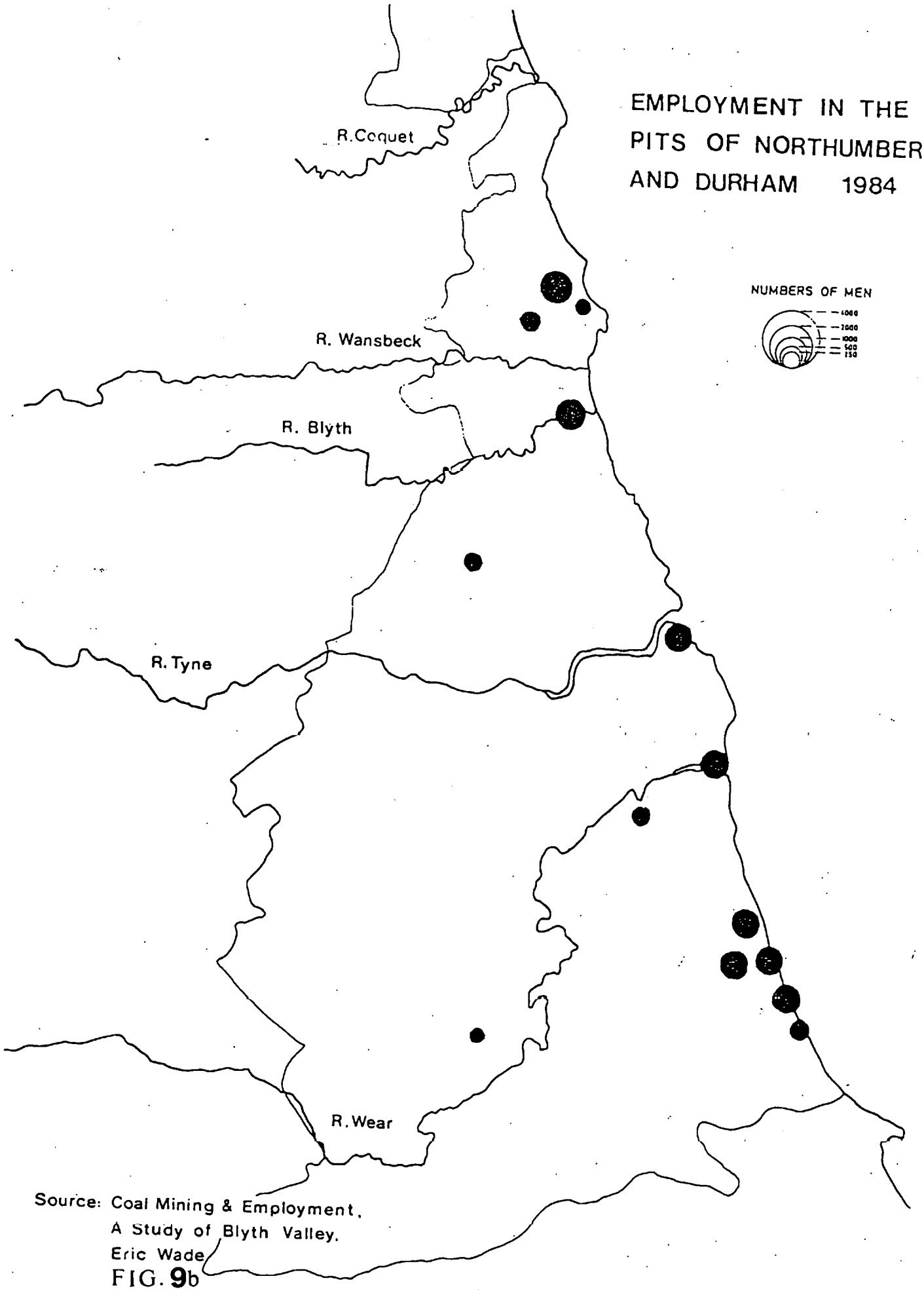
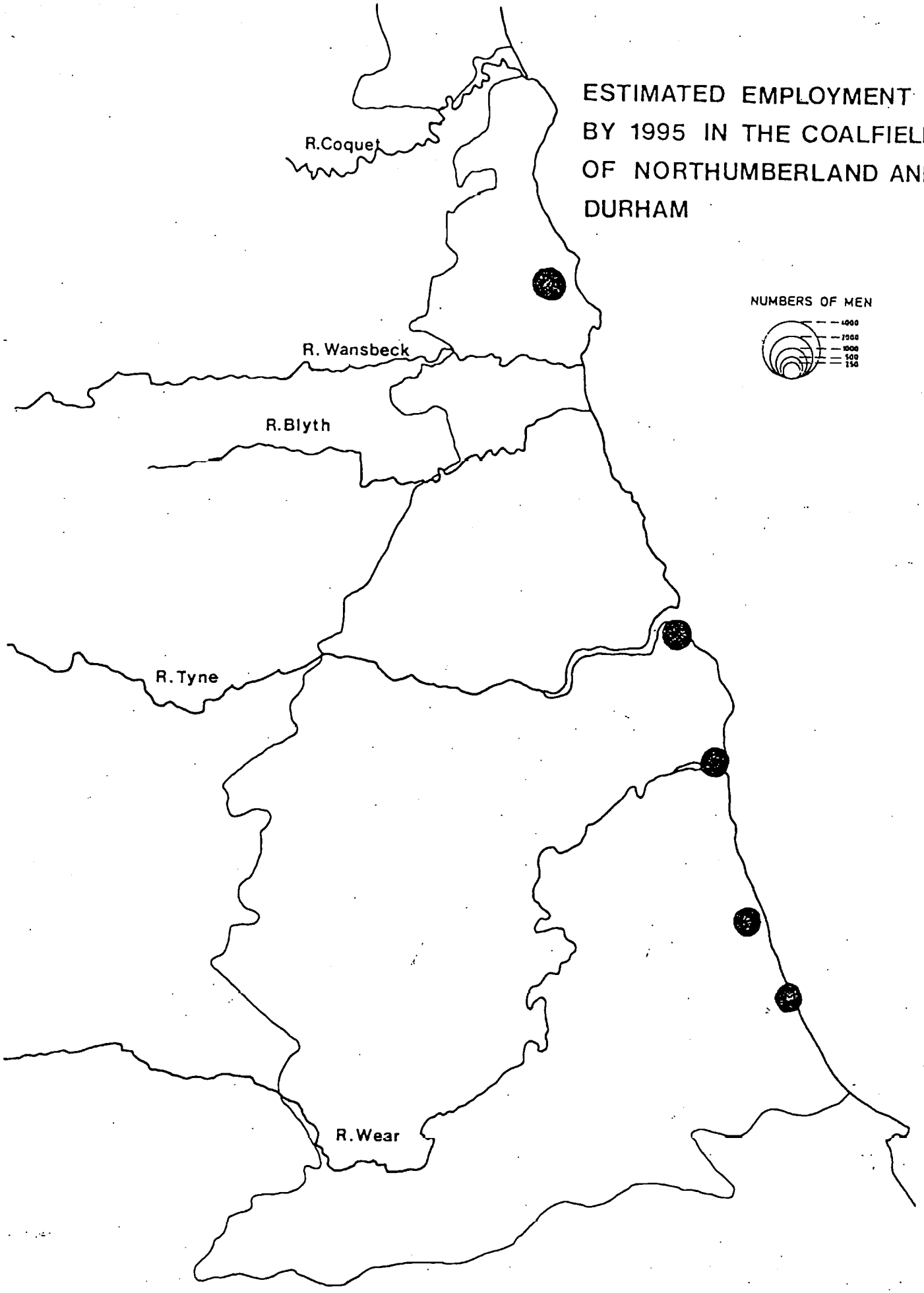

EMPLOYMENT
AT COLLIERIES
1957
NUMBERS OF MEN
Amble
R Coquet
Newbiggin
Morpeth
R Wansbeck
Blyth
R. Blyth
Whitley Bay
North Shields
South Shields
Hexham
Newcastle
Jarrow
R Tyne
Sunderland
Consett
Chester-le-Street
Seaham
Easington
Durham
R. Wear
Crook
Spennymoor
West Hartlepool
Bishop Auckland
SOURCE: COLLIERY YEAR BOOK 1958

FIG. 9 a



Source: Coal Mining & Employment.
A Study of Blyth Valley.
Eric Wade

FIG. 9b



Source: Coal Mining & Employment, A Study Of Blyth Valley.
Eric Wade

FIG.9c

NORTHUMBERLAND COLLIERIES

IN PRODUCTION SINCE 1947

MANPOWER

1947 to Closure or Present Time

FIG.10

Sources: "Guide to the Coalfields 1948-86" 'Colliery Guardian Publication, and 'Colliery Year Books' 1947-56.

Following the names of the collieries are combined figures of the numbers of men employed below and above ground.

Also included are those mines which have been temporarily discontinued, together with those which have been abandoned since 1st January, 1947.

Date of Opening & Closure	COLLIERY	1947 or opening date	1960	1974	1978	1985	At Closure
South Northumberland Area No. 7							
1909 - 29.8.52	Acomb Drift	317	-	-	-	-	155
1784 - 19.2.66	Backworth 'Algernon'	721	645	-	-	-	333
1860 - 1.9.73	Bankworth 'Fenwick'	810	808	-	-	-	609
1814 - 19.7.80	Backworth 'Eccles'	730	693	504	517	-	526
1814 - 2.12.60	Backworth 'Maude'	805	728	-	-	-	728
1940 - 24.11.73	Bardon Mill	240 (first figures 1953)	332	-	-	-	270
1837 - 22.11.75	Burradon	575	670	301	-	-	301
1936 - 11.9.48	Callerton	61	-	-	-	-	64
1910 - 29.10.66.	East Walbottle (Combined with Prestwick 31.8.65)	178	220	-	-	-	434
1860 - 1947	Fell Drift (Prudhoe)	87	-	-	-	-	87
1952 - 29.10.76	Havannah Drift (Combined with East Walbottle and Prestwick 31.8.65)	182	517	573	-	-	573
1895 - 25.4.64	Hazlerigg	789	719	-	-	-	506

Date of Opening & Closure	COLLIERY	1947 or opening date	1960	1974	1978	1985	At Closure
- 1961	Hedley Park and Mickley (See West Wylam & Mickley)	253	-	-	-	-	-
-	Henshaw Drift	124	-	-	-	-	-
1938 - 16.8.58	Lambley	86	-	-	-	-	184
1.3.56 - 22.2.63	Loughbridge Drift	42	119	-	-	-	119
- 1947	Low Prudhoe Drift	18	-	-	-	-	18
1750 - 13.11.59	Montague Main	719	-	-	-	-	850
Jan.52 - 1.7.60	Morwood (See licenced mines before 1952)	92	-	-	-	-	136
1926 - 30.7.54	Naworth (High Midgeholme)	285 (first figures 1953)	-	-	-	-	169
1894 - 24.2.68	North Walbottle	1043	1064	-	-	-	935
1904 - 31.8.65	Prestwick (Combined with Havannah & East Walbottle 31.8.65).	120	176	-	-	-	247
1.1.53 - 31.5.58	Rake Lane Drift, Backworth	82	-	-	-	-	119
-	Reaygarth, Gilsland	17					
1908 - 26.4.69	Rising Sun & Wallsend'G'	1228	1764	-	-	-	1173
before 1947 -	Robin Rock Drift, Haltwhistle. (See licenced mines after 1972).	181					
March 1952 - 4.10.58	Stagshaw	37	-	-	-	-	86
1800 - 27.1.56	Throckley "Blucher"	257	-	-	-	-	326
1800 - 20.8.54	Throckley 'Coronation'	337	-	-	-	-	312
1869 - 29.1.54	Throckley 'Isabella'	377	-	-	-	-	127
1908 - 13.3.53.	Throckley 'Maria'	496	-	-	-	-	235
- 1947	Towneley Drift, Prudhoe	173	-	-	-	-	173
1937 - 20.2.59	Ventners Hall, Haltwhistle	150	-	-	-	-	167

Date of Opening & Closure	COLLIERY	1947	1960	1974	1978	1985	At Closure
		for opening date					
1903 - 10.9.66	Weetslade	522	638	-	-	-	1066
1844 - 26.5.61	West Wylam & Mickley (See Hedley Park & Mickley)	408	1046	-	-	-	1046
Mid-Northumberland Area No.8.							
1892 - 26.10.62	Barmoor	63	68	-	-	-	68
1904 - 31.5.86	Bates	1165	1673	1789	1671	1735	880
1838 - 25.9.71	Bedlington 'A'	938	840	-	-	-	568
1854 - 2.3.68	Bedlington 'Doctor'	1028	754	-	-	-	549
1860 - 16.3.62	Bedlington 'E'	970	410	-	-	-	410
1905 - 23.10.65	Bedlington 'F' (Bomarsund)	733	599	-	-	-	555
1954 - 30.12.85	Brenkley Drift	186	413	617	659	639	639
1866 - 20.4.68	Cambois	984	1196	-	-	-	818
1857 - 16.7.66	Choppington 'A'	712	510	-	-	-	363
1869 - 26.2.66	Choppington 'B'	374	411	-	-	-	446
1848 - 12.2.66	Cowpen 'Isabella'	95	515	-	-	-	407
1885 - 12.7.69	Cowpen 'Mill'	885	846	-	-	-	802
-	Cramlington (Central Washery)	52					
1867 - 26.2.60	Dinnington	275	404	-	-	-	404
1854 - 29.4.77	Dudley	762	671	499	-	-	417
1935 - 1.6.51	Gloria	301	-	-	-	-	300
1866 - 24.2.61	Hartford	598	634	-	-	-	634
1853 - 26.1.62	Horton Grange	530	395	-	-	-	395
1896 - 1954	Lamb	57	-	-	-	-	52
1934 - 4.1.58	Nelson	387	-	-	-	-	258
1836 - 5.1.74	Netherton 'Howard'	765	468	-	-	-	626
1859 - 2.4.55	New Delaval	434	-	-	-	-	274
1872 - 20.2.59	New Hartley	506	-	-	-	-	389
1859 - 20.1.61	North Seaton	899	340	-	-	-	340

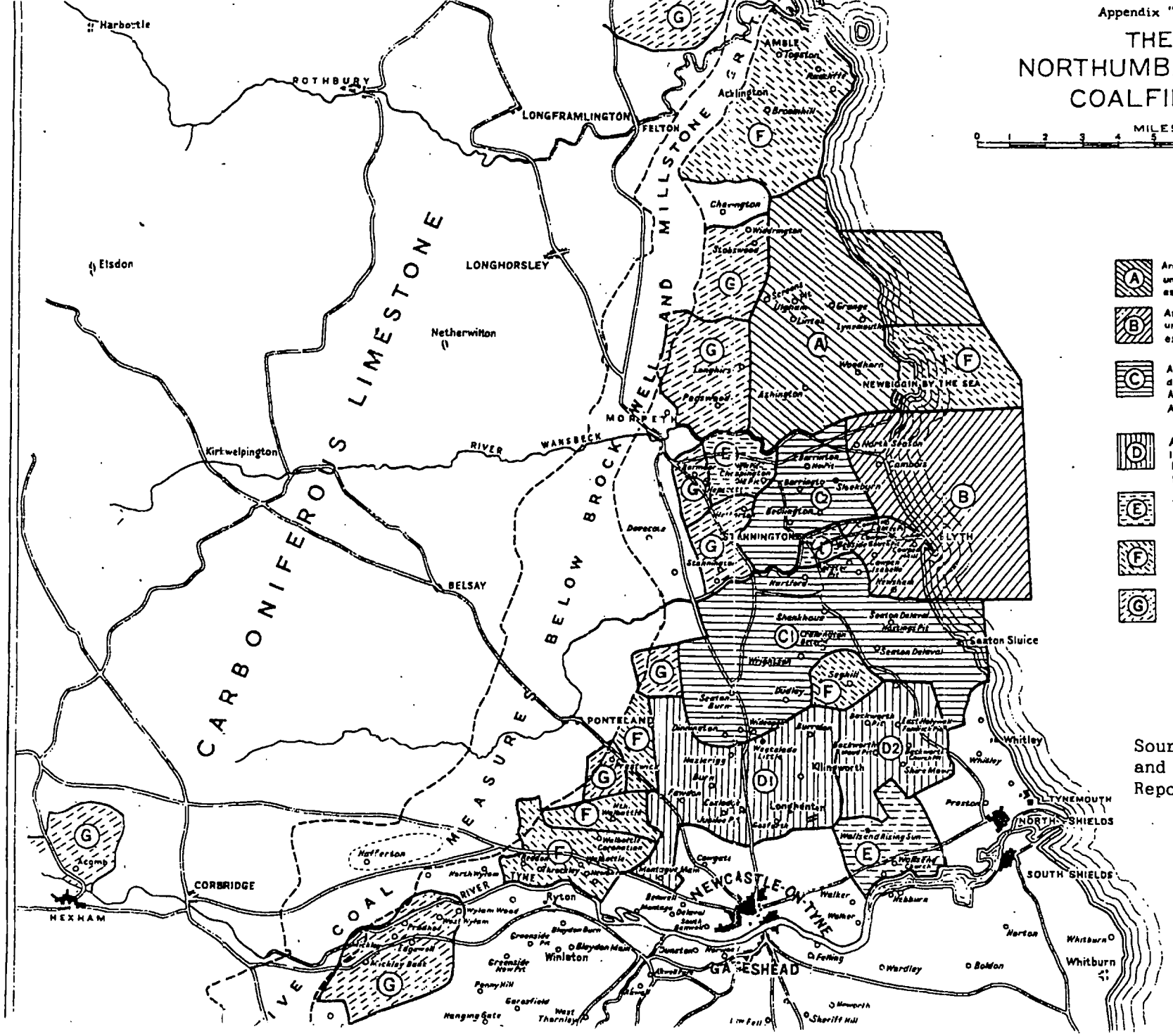
Date of Opening & Closure	COLLIERY	1947 or opening date	1960	1974	1978	1985	At Closure
1868 - 22.2.69	Pegswood (See Bothal Park Drift & Pegswood).						
1844 - 17.8.63	Seaton Burn	704	241	-	-	-	241
1838 - 27.5.60	Seaton Delaval	815	-	-	-	-	405
1865 - 28.9.62	Seghill	1184	1024	-	-	-	1024
1930 - 30.5.47	West Clifton	65	-	-	-	-	65
1938 - 16.7.54	Williams	241	-	-	-	-	155
North Northumberland. Area No. 9							
1867 - 25.3.88	Ashington 'Bothal, Carl, Duke and Coneygarth'	3966	3264	1119	903	813	350
1943 - 20.2.59	Blackhill	161	-	-	-	-	202
1936 - 1954-B.P.1969-P.	Bothal Park Drift & Pegswood	804	751	-	-	-	715
1850 - 3.2.61	Broomhill	994	710	-	-	-	710
1913 -	Ellington	1414	1450	1563	1729	2179	Still open (1992 = 1963)
1924 - 26.11.66	Hauxley	290	483	-	-	-	585
-	Haux ley South Drift	20					
1895 - 28.9.68	Linton	1280	1229	-	-	-	1127
9.1.56 - 15.3.69	Longhirst Drift	40	350	-	-	-	573
1927/34 - 1.8.82	Lynemouth	806	1623	1823	1848	-	1527
1911 - 11.11.67	Newbiggin	1108	390	-	-	-	549
1921/5 - 1.8.81	Shilbottle 'Grange'	549	745	640	570	-	564
1875 - 1.5.65	Stobswood	352	437	-	-	-	352
1920 - 8.1.87.	Whittle (now a Private Mine)	263	238	648	612	587	766
1897 - 1.8.81	Woodhorn	1765	1754	618	597	-	486
	TOTALS	43062	35975	10694	9106	5953	

Date of Opening & Closure	COLLIERY	1947 or opening date	1960	1974	1978	1985	At Closure
Licensed Mines pre-1940	Ayle East Drift, Alston			9	8	10	Still Open
- 1952	Burnhouse No. 1	4	-	-	-	-	4
- 1947	Crystal Well Drift 1 & 2 (Abandoned April,'47).						
- 1975	Elsdon	9	31	25	-	-	25
- 1951	Eltringham Drift	6	-	-	-	-	6
- 1950	Fell End, Haltwhistle	9	-	-	-	-	9
pre 1855 - 1952	Hareshaw Head	20	-	-	-	-	20
-	Harsondale (Fireclay)	5					
- 1950	Hedley Bank	19	-	-	-	-	19
? - 1982 ?	Hedley West Riding Drift	-	-	14	14	-	12
1954 - 1965 ?	Hedley North Farm Drift	7	-	-	-	-	7
- 1964	Hook Hill, Corbridge (Fireclay)	6	-	-	-	-	6
Closed in 1930's & later reopened till 1956	Mickley Bank	7	-	-	-	-	8
- 1960	Morwood, Bardon Mill	21	See N.C.B. list after 1953.				
1901 - 1952	North Drift, Lambley	6	-	-	-	-	6
1904 - 1991	Plashetts (Falstone)	16	11	9	9	9	9
1937/8 - 1983	Ramshawfield Drift (previously Ramshaw Drift)	27	27	15	18	-	15
prel947 - 1991	Robin Rock Drift, Haltwhistle	181 = N.C.B.	-	13	6	4	4
- 1975	Scotswood Drift, Adamsez Ltd.	12	10	4	-	-	4
-	South Tyne Clay Drift (Limestone & Fireclay)	4					
1869 - 1974	Sutty Row	24	17	9	-	-	9
- 1950	Thorngrafton Fireclay, Bardon Mill.	2	-	-	-	-	2
- 1950	Tile-sheds Drift, Causey Park Longhorseley. (Fireclay)	5	-	-	-	-	5

Date of Opening & Closure	COLLIERY	1947 or opening date	1960	1974	1978	1985	At Closure
Licensed Mines Cont...							
- 1958	Whinfield Drifts, Kiln Pit Hill, Shotley Bridge.	20	-	-	-	-	11
- 1965	Whinnetly Drift, Haydon Bridge.	16	-	-	-	-	16
- 1966	Woodhouse, Coanwood.	2	4	-	-	-	4
Close Feb.1947 due to flooding.	Church Hill Drift No. 1						

Appendix "N.E"

THE NORTHUMBERLAND COALFIELD.



MILES 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

FIG.11

(A) Area of large undeveloped reserves, including under sea coal: increased production at 1960 estimated to be +4 million tons per annum.

(B) Area of large reserves including substantial undeveloped reserves increased production at 1960 estimated to be 2·5 million tons per annum.

(C) Areas of increased production possessing large developed reserves.
Area C1: Estimated output at 1960 1·5-2 million tons.
Area C2: " " " " 1-1·5 " " .

(D) Areas of increased production: Estimated output of 1960: ·8- million tons.
D1. area has a probable life of more than 150yrs.
D2. " " " " " " 80 "

(E) Areas possessing fairly large reserves: estimated output at 1960 of +·5 million tons.

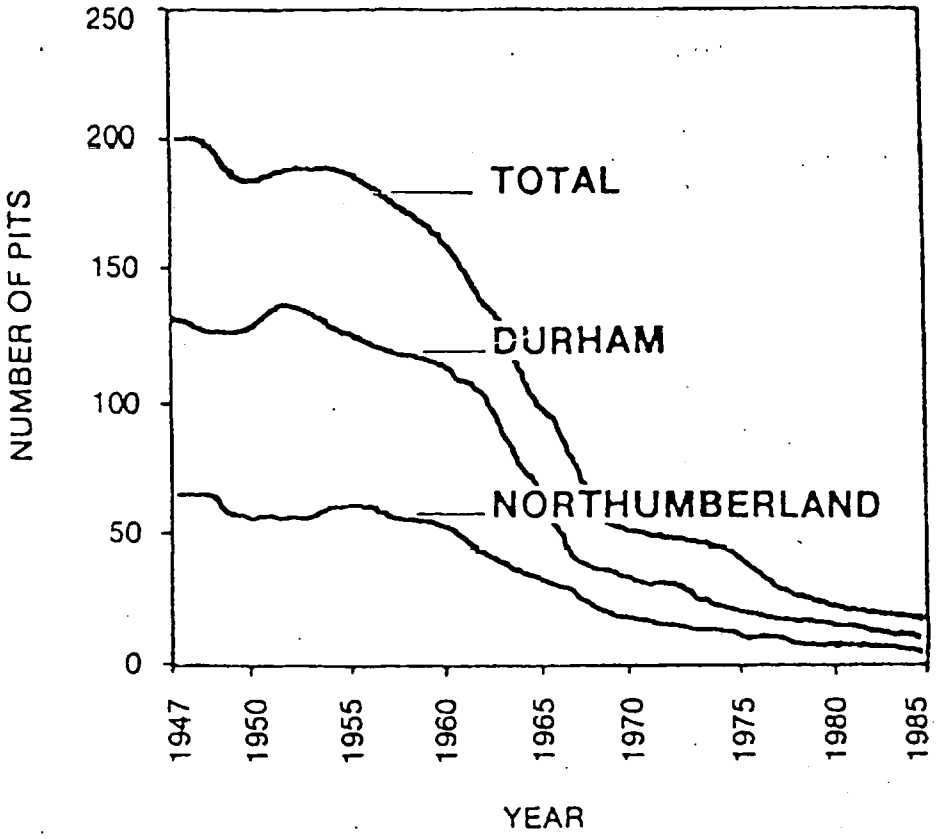
(F) Areas having a shorter life than the above groups and maintaining an output of ·5- ·3 million tons per annum.

(G) Areas with outputs of less than ·3 million tons per annum and varying life.

Source; Ministry of Fuel and Power. Regional Survey Report. (Northern "A" Region) 1945

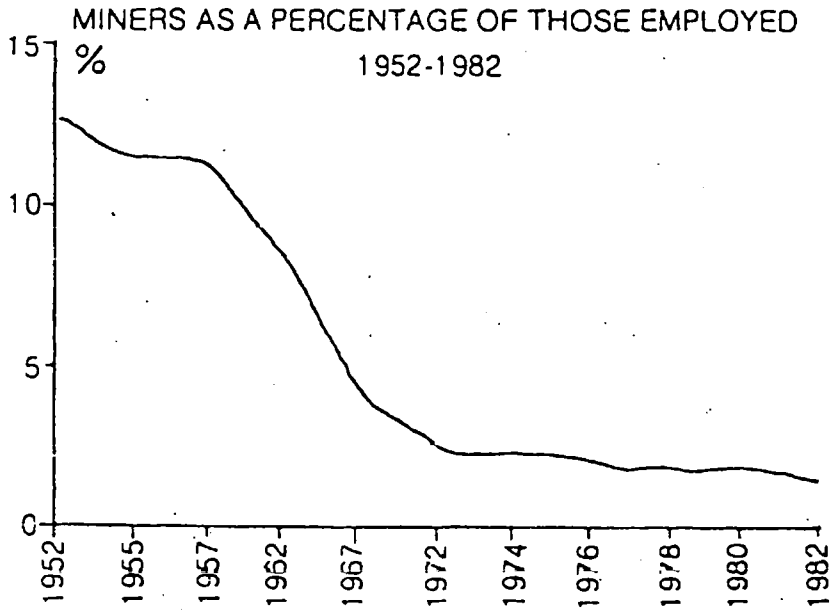
GRAPH 1

NUMBER OF PITS IN NORTH EAST COALFIELD
1947-1984



source: National Coal Board

GRAPH 2



source: Department of Employment

IN 'PLAN FOR COAL' PAGE 14

FIG. 12

THE 1960's AND 1970's

During the 1960's successive waves of colliery closures and contractions swept through Northumberland and Durham. Central government, faced with seemingly endless supplies of cheap oil and the prospect of cheap nuclear-generated electricity, moved decisively toward a diversified energy policy.

Support for the coal industry was cut back and the N.C.B. savagely cut capacity and employment. These closures were intended to cut costs of energy, as one way of enhancing the competitive position of manufacturing in the UK. The price of this new energy policy fell unevenly on regions such as the North East paying particularly heavily.

Here communities were devastated by pit closures and miners still comment on the irrationality of the process which often saw collieries being closed just as major modernisation investments had been completed.[10] The mining industry had been condemned to death. In "Coal is our Life" by Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter they said

> "We do not mourn the death of a dangerous and health-destroying industry as such, any more than do the miners themselves. Insofar as this decline is part of the abolition of arduous manual labour then it is a step along the path to human freedom. But in the social relations actually existing it is not yet any such thing. Social relations do not adapt to the cultural basis of progress automatically or according to the course

> of power. As a member of the working class, the miner exercises that right under conditions established through a century and a half of organisation and struggle. For miners today, the death of their industry means that the heart is torn from their communities. There is no overall planning of new industries or of training or of education for leisure and there is no more than marginal provision for economic security."

The fact that the closure programme generally went uncontested was partly due to a reluctance to embarrass a Labour government and, also, to the promises made of alternative jobs to replace those lost in the mines; promises which were largely unfulfilled.

A TEMPORARY RESPITE

By the early 1970's the future for the North East coalfield looked altogether brighter. For one thing the oil crisis ended the era of cheap oil for ever and the 1974 "Plan for Coal" seemingly gave coal a revived role in relation to power station markets. As a result, pits that had been closed as being uneconomic in the 1960's would not now have been regarded so. Suddenly, interest in the value of Britain's coal resources was regenerated. It was the second coming of coal.

The "Plan for Coal" was agreed between the N.C.B., N.U.M. and the Government. This was to provide an investment of £1400 million in ten years (at 1974 prices) with expansion and increased production in the mining industry. This promised an optimistic

future, with the importance of coal once more being recognised. In the same year, however, the Government also agreed on the continued research and development of the fast breeder reactor with a massive 51.4% of the Department of Energy's budget, as opposed to the 7.4% set aside for development of coal technology.[12]

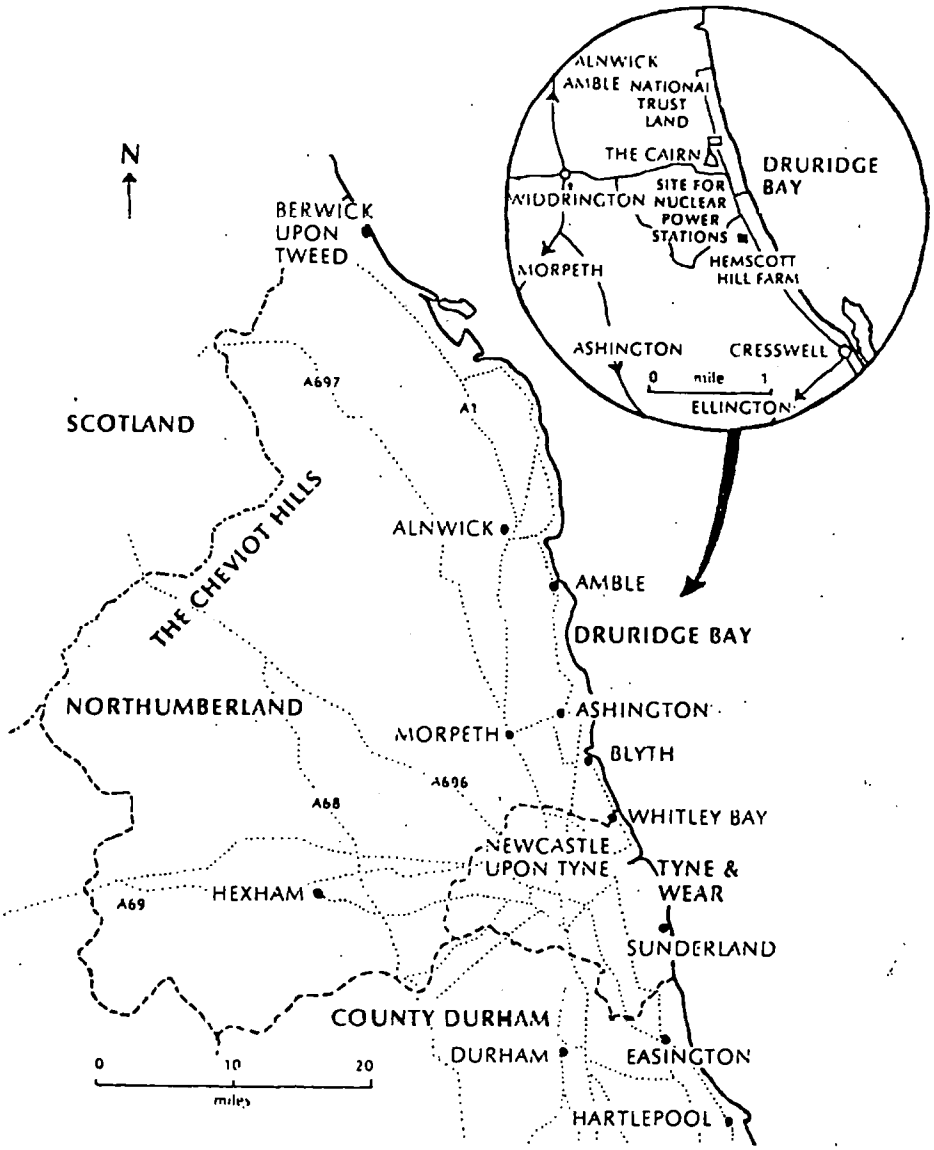
NUCLEAR POWER

In the late 1970's when a Conservative Government came to power, there was a noticeable shift towards nuclear power in terms of future energy policy. In Northumberland a strong campaign began to oppose nuclear power, as a site was proposed at a local beauty spot - Druridge Bay (See Fig. 13). The organisation was called the Druridge Bay Association and began an intense programme of activities. One of its earliest aims was to ensure that Northumberland County Council opposed the nuclear proposals. The Association questioned the Central Electricity Generating Board's statement that,

> "the C.E.G.B. wishes to investigate the Druridge Bay area in Northumberland to assess its potential as a nuclear power station site. Surveys of this area are expected to start early in the new year and would include exploratory drilling and hydrographic work. The Board has no firm plans for power station development in the north east."

However, in this paper entitled "Nuclear Power Investigations", one can see the way the C.E.G.B. were thinking in 1979. It pointed out that a new, large nuclear power station would be

NORTH EAST ENGLAND AND DRURIDGE BAY
showing site for proposed nuclear power stations



Source: "Generating Pressure" Bridget Gubbins. 1991.

FIG. 13

needed for the north-east area because electricity demand would be likely to increase by 25% by 1990/1. To secure an adequate security of supply to north-east industries and homes the C.E.G.B. considered that the best solution would be to build a new nuclear power station at Druridge Bay.[13] In a reply paper compiled by the Association called "Some Facts Against" information gleaned from the publication by Gerald Leach of the International Institute for Environment and Development, "A Low Energy Strategy for the United Kingdom", they criticised the C.E.G.B.'s forecasts as greatly exaggerated and pointed out how electricity generating needs by 2000 AD could easily be met without a large expanding nuclear programme.

1986 was the year when public consciousness of the dangers of nuclear power was at its height. As well as the Chernobyl accident there had been a series of leaks at Sellafield during January, February and March, followed by a damning report by the Commons Select Committee on the environment. There were leaks at Dounreay reprocessing plant in Caithness in May, and faults at Dungeness and Hinkley nuclear plants in May and June.[14] Anxiously, the nuclear industry tried to regain the favour of public opinion. Its immediate reaction to the Chernobyl accident was to claim that "it couldn't happen here". The Sizewell Inquiry report, due later that year, was bound by its terms of reference to ignore anything that happened after the Inquiry had finished, including Chernobyl.

The nuclear industry brazened out the consequences of the accident, relying on the short memory of the public for drama, however

intense. The industry is enduring and patient, and has plenty of time to sit out problems. The focus of attention has moved from the safety aspects of nuclear power, so prominent in 1986, to its economics in the late 80's.

Claims that nuclear power is cheaper than coal have not been proven.[15] The C.E.G.B.'s calculations exclude certain costs and are therefore unreliable. No account is taken of expensive research and development costs of nuclear energy, nor will the Government disclose the true comparative costs of coal and nuclear power. Claims that nuclear energy is required to prevent an "energy gap" because of the possibility of coal running out, are also unfounded. Actual demand for electricity is falling due to the economic recession. As the C.E.G.B. is the main customer of British Coal this has consequently led to a reduction in the demand for coal. It is therefore not reasonable to argue that nuclear power is necessary because of the possibility of coal supplies running out. It has been estimated that there are large enough coal reserves to last well into the next century, by which time alternatives to fossil energy should be coming into use i.e. solar, wind and wave power, geothermal energy and hydropower.

In the late 80's the interests of big business were very much in evidence in the push towards nuclear energy.[16] Colin Sweet (1985) suggested that extremely powerful multinationals (N.E.I., B.I.C.C., G.E.C., Babcock and Taylor Woodrow) were all competing for the millions of pounds to be made in nuclear power engineering and construction. He argued that oil companies were

also deeply financially involved in the international coal trade and would welcome the chance to import coal into this country through their subsidiaries. He believed that the Government intended to privatise the coal industry, selling off its most profitable pits and closing down the smaller "loss-making" ones. As the Queen's Speech verified at the opening of Parliament after the General Election in April 1992 - he has been proved right.

During January and February 1989, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Privatisation of the Electricity Bill went through the bill clause by clause. Three North Eastern M.P.'s were on this Committee, Giles Radice, Tony Blair and Alan Beith, and they fought for amendments. However, the government majority would not permit any changes of consequence. While the Electricity Bill was making its way through Parliament, the national debate on energy issues was taking place in parallel. In September 1988, the public inquiry into Britain's second PWR at Hinkley had started, where the C.E.G.B. admitted that nuclear power could be more expensive than coal. Other evidence at the Hinkley Inquiry showed that wind turbines would be more economic than nuclear power stations, and that the cost of building Sizewell B had increased by 1 million pounds, 7% more than expected.

All these were shocking admissions, reducing the confidence of those in the private sector, who might be buying the soon-to-be privatised electricity industry, complete with its nuclear component. On 24th July 1989 Cecil Parkinson announced to an astonished House of Commons that the older Magnox nuclear power stations were not to be included in the electricity sell-

off, but would remain in State hands. Tony Blair was astonished by this announcement. He said "The Magnox stations remain in public ownership, so the full costs of decommissioning, disposing and reprocessing of the waste will fall on the taxpayers. The latest estimates are £500 million a station. A total of £4.5 billion, perhaps even more." "Guardian" 25.7.89. Tony Blair sought postponement of the bill. He said months of consideration of the bill in standing committee were now useless. His motion was lost by a Government majority of 107.

The nuclear disasters at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl were caused by operator error.[17] When reactor No. 4 at Chernobyl nuclear power station exploded on 26th April, 1986 the winds were blowing north and most of the nuclear contamination fell in Belarus. 2.5 million people still live in an area affected by low-level radiation, and of these 80,000 are children. They are not ill but their immune systems are weakened so that minor ailments can become serious and they tire easily. In the worst affected areas children cannot play outside and the school day has been cut to 3 hours. No-one knows for certain what the effects of such long term exposure will be.

The privatisation of electricity means that the C.E.G.B. does not exist as a body any longer. However, the nuclear industry is not lying down - the State-owned Company - Nuclear Electric has refused to sell the land at Druridge Bay, Northumberland. Councillor Kevin Flaherty, Chairman of Planning and Economic Development at Northumberland County Council received a letter

from Sam Goddard of Nuclear Electric, dated 5.2.1990, saying

> "When in the future the case for further nuclear power stations is established, Druridge will be among the site options available for consideration by Nuclear Electric."[18]

When Blyth coal-fired power station closes early next century, it is essential that a non-nuclear regional energy policy has been adopted.

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CHAPTER FIVE

UNECONOMIC PITS AND THE "STRIKE"

INCREASE IN OPENCAST

The privatising tendency in the coal industry was evident in the early 1980's. Increasingly, private contractors were used in the collieries for the laying of conveyors in roadways; and this established practice was to develop considerably in the aftermath of the strike. Another powerful force of private enterprise could be observed in the industry and this was in the opencast sector. Here coal was mined by privately owned civil engineering companies. On the large sites these companies dug the coal under contract to the N.C.B.'s Opencast Executive. On a growing number of small sites, the operators (with a licence from the Opencast Executive) sold the coal on the open market. Both these sources of "privately mined" coal raised a growing influence upon the character of the industry in the 1980's.

The N.C.B. recognised that deep mines were closing, but it refused to give the trade unions or the County Council any assurance that opencast mining would be reduced in scale in the North. In fact, the opposite was hinted at, and at meetings and public inquiries the N.C.B. and private opencast operators testified to the "need" for opencast coal.

Opencast coal mining began on an organised basis in 1942 as part of the war-time effort to maximise coal production. Its role was clearly established as an important supplement to deep-mined production. This role was confirmed in 1959 when, in a period

of recession in coal demand, opencast production was deliberately curtailed. A similar cutback occurred in 1968-9.

Under the "Plan for Coal" (1974) and "Coal for the Future"(1977), investment in deep-mined production was supported by an expansion in opencast capacity. Production in opencast mines was projected to increase from 9m tonnes (1973-4) to 15m tonnes; with 3m tonnes for the North East.[1] In contrast to the expansion in opencast coal mining, deep-mined output in the North East declined from 14.1m tonnes in 1980 to 12.4m tonnes in 1983 and 11.9m tonnes in 1984. The statement from the N.C.B. in March 1984 indicated a further 1.4m tonnes reduction in output from the deep mines to a level of 10.5m tonnes in 1985.[2] On top of this, in 1985 the N.C.B. announced the closure of the Horden and Bates Collieries. This left the men - and men at other "marginal" collieries waiting on the sidelines - expecting the worst.

This period of contraction had been a long one and during it there had been no cutback in opencast output or capacity. In 1960, 7.7m tonnes of opencast coal represented just 4% of national coal production; in 1984 the 14m tonnes represented 13% of national production,[3] concentrated in a few national producers. Opencast coal production was clearly being established in a new role and one which was at odds with its historical relationship with the deep-mining industry. Rather than supplementing deep-mined production, it was emerging as an alternative and competing source of supply within a static or declining market. In the North East opencast production (at 20% of the area's total output) had established this role most clearly. By 1984 the

ratio of opencast to deep mined in the North East was 1:4;
[4]
nationally the ratio was 1:7.

UNECONOMIC PITS

"Pits may become uneconomic by virtue of investment failure or by methods of accounting used"

(T. Berry et al
"N.C.B. Accounts - A Mine of Misinformation" Accountancy June 1985. 5

The 1984/5 miners' dispute was brought about, on the face of it, because of closure of so called "uneconomic" pits. However, it has been said that this was merely a surface issue, used to provoke confrontation with the N.U.M. as a means of bringing the whole trade union movement into line.[6] The Tory Party, when in opposition, drew up contingency plans for dealing with such a confrontation. The Ridley Report (leaked to "The Economist" in 1978) provided the basis for future Conservative Government policy. This Report discussed the future of nationalised industries and their proposed privatisation. It also predicted the likelihood of trade union dissent regarding redundancies, etc. The coal industry was suggested as the most likely area in which the battle should be fought. The Report recommended that a future Conservative Government should prepare for this by:

1. building up coal stocks, especially at power stations
2. make plans for importing coal
3. encourage hauliers' recruitment of non-union labour
4. conversion of power stations to dual coal/oil fired
5. make union finance its members by cutting off benefits to them
6. set up large mobile squad of police, ostensibly to deal with picketing.

"Plan for Coal" Page 8.

This Report was largely acted upon as soon as the present Tory Government came to power. This culminated in the announcement of the closure of Cortonwood Pit in South Yorkshire, a pit, which even the N.C.B. had said had five years of life in it. As a result, the coal industry's longest ever strike began in March, 1984.

The main issue was that of uneconomic pits. Andrew Glyn suggests that there is no such thing as an uneconomic pit, and that closure of pits and loss of production, far from benefitting the rest of society, will actually lead to higher taxation and lower living standards. His conclusion is:

> "Under present circumstances, there is no economic case for pit closure before exhaustion of mineable reserves".[7]

He suggested in 1985 that operating losses in themselves did not justify closure. Figures given by N.C.B. Accountants for 1983/4 (See Fig. 14) demonstrate the coal industry as heavily reliant on government subsidy. These figures, he points out, show subsidy by the tax payer of £1.3 billion. These consisted of

(1)	N.C.B. Operating Losses	£358 million
(2)	N.C.B. Interest Payments	£467 million
(3)	Social Costs	£344 million
(4)	Direct Government payment to redundant miners	£150 million

Glyn points out that the figure for operating losses (Fig.14) includes £245 million payment of surface damage costs i.e. - claims for subsidence, etc. He believes that this does not reflect costs arising from today's mining and therefore should not be considered. Or, if they are, it might be argued, so should the costs of nuclear waste disposal when examining the costs of nuclear power generation. Similarly, he shows that costs also include pensions paid to retired miners and cannot be included in current costs of coal extraction. He does agree that these costs must be met, but argues that they would have to be met regardless of closure and consequently should not be regarded as a subsidy to current coal production.

He also considers the "social costs" payments, that is:

> "Costs in respect of the closure of uneconomic capacity or redundancy of employees, which are wholly or partly met by government grants."[8]

These costs, he argues, are incurred not as a result of producing coal. Rather they are paid as a result of not producing coal and it should not be implied they are a subsidy to coal production. The same argument, he suggests, applies to redundant miners and the costs of maintaining them. This cost would seem to present an argument to keep pits open and not part of an argument to prove them uneconomic!

Most of the interest payments shown in these figures, Glyn maintains, go directly back to Government. He suggests, that these are in fact a reflection of the Government's high interest rates and are

exceptionally high compared with other enterprises, both private and public. As N.C.B. investment is predominantly financed by high fixed interest loans, this means that, in effect, the Government is paying this part of the subsidy back to itself with a substantially inflated return.

From these arguments, he concludes that Government subsidies were, on the whole, used to cover historical and exceptional items and therefore cannot be said to be subsidising current coal production. They cannot therefore justify the N.C.B. pit closure programme on uneconomic grounds, because these items would not be reduced by closure.

TABLE 1

THE NCB's ACCOUNTS

1983/84	Actual NCB Accounts (col. 1)	Adjusted to Economic Categories (col. 2)
	(1) Profit and Loss Account	
	£ million	£ million
Turnover	4660	4660
− Operating Costs	5018	4968
Raw materials and stores	947	947
Employee costs	2430	2430
Other costs (net)	1283	958[1]
Depreciation	(historic cost) 358	(replacement cost) 633
= Operating Profit	− 358	− 308
+ Costs of dispute	n.a.	212
= Underlying Net Profit	n.a.	−96
+ Depreciation	n.a.	633
= Underlying gross profit	n.a.	537
	(2) Appropriation of Profit	
Underlying Gross Profit		537
+ Social Grants and Deficit Grants from Government		1145
= Total Receipts		1682
− Payments		1136
Provisions for additional subsidence costs		195[1]
Pensions to past employees, etc.		130[1]
Social costs (redundancy, etc.)		344
Interest payments (net)		467
= Underlying Gross Savings		546
	(3) Capital Account	
Investment in fixed assets		698
+ Additions to stocks		−92
= Total Investment		606
− Underlying Gross Savings		546
− Profits on Sale of Assets		22
= Underlying Borrowing Requirement		38
+ Costs of Dispute		212
= Actual Net Borrowing		240

(1) The figure for other net costs is adjusted from the NCB accounts to exclude all but £50 million of the £245 million provision for subsidence costs (the £50 million being assumed to reflect provisions against effect of current mining) and the £130 million pensions to past employees.
Source: NCB Accounts 1983/84.

SOURCE:
'ECONOMIC CASE AGAINST PIT CLOSURES' A. Glyn

FIG. 14

Glyn and others have looked at the quantifiable costs of closure. These costs were shared by the N.C.B., E.E.C., Central Government and Local Government, and are as follows:-

Costs to N.C.B.	Statutory Redundancy Payments
	Write-off of buildings, plant and machinery
Costs to E.E.C.	Redundancy payments under E.C.S.C
	Re-adaptation benefits scheme (paid only on closure on uneconomic grounds)
Costs to Central Government	Payment of unemployment benefit
	Contribution to Statutory Redundancy
	Additional payments under Redundant Miners' Payment Scheme.
	Rent and Rate Rebates (90% funded by Central Government)
	Lost National Insurance contributions
	Lost Income Tax
Costs to Local Government	Increased Rent and Rates Rebate (10% funded by local government)
	Loss of N.C.B. Rate Revenue
	Increased take up of free school meals

The closure of pits therefore, would cost the taxpayer more than it would save. Glyn considered individual pits and found that losses in the 20 most 'loss-making' pits were running at approximately £153 million per year, but calculated costs of closure at £267 million per year. Keeping these twenty pits open results in a saving to the taxpayer of £114 million per year. This overall picture showed that no pit "deserved" to close on economic grounds

when taking into consideration the wider costs. This was also confirmed by the other academics researching at this time.[9]

These other studies also considered the impact of job losses in mining communities in the context of the local economy. Severe loss of jobs in the coal industry subsequently produced a "knock-on" effect on local employment of equal severity. Loss of jobs by any major employer produces a "downward multiplier effect" on employment in other areas of the local economy. These are of two sorts:-

(a) Linkage Multiplier Effect

This concerns jobs lost in manufacturing and service organisations which supplied goods and services to the coal industry. These job losses then go on to produce "second level multipliers" - which in turn affect their own suppliers, and so it goes on.

(b) Income Multiplier Effect

This concerns local job losses in retail companies, produced by loss of spending power when workers are made redundant. These job losses go on to reduce demand even further and result in "second level multiplier effect" and so on.

These effects are real, but not easy to measure. Because these costs are not apparent in N.C.B. accounts does not mean they should not be taken into consideration when considering the overall effect of closure on a community.

Another indirect effect of closure upon Central Government is pointed out by Francis Peck.[10] He suggested that the transfer of men to other collieries, reinforced the block on youth recruitment and thus was linked indirectly to increased expenditure on Y.T.S., each trainee costing Government at least £2000. This put further strain on the Careers Service and lead to its expansion. These transfers, had severe social consequences for mining communities. Again these costs were not considered in N.C.B. accounting of its pit closure programme.

NORTHUMBERLAND - THE STRIKE

In the Northumberland Coalfield seventeen miners were dismissed by their employers. This was the result of many "disruptions" and angry scenes, particularly when Mr. Ian MacGregor, N.C.B.'s Chairman visited the Region. Miners in Northumberland saw this "punishment" taking two forms a) the closure of pits and b) the dismissal of selected miners. The sentences imposed by the courts were severe and two miners served prison terms, on top of losing their jobs. Some of the seventeen miners were not actually "charged" with committing any offence, but were still dismissed by the N.C.B. Two miners employed at the privately owned Shadfen Drift Mine were dismissed for just supporting the strike.

11

THE WOMEN BEHIND THE NORTHUMBERLAND MINERS

The Ellington Women's Support Group soon began meeting and making up food parcels and toys they collected from the Community. In the course of this work the Support Groups became very strong and the women involved, from ordinary housewives became very politicised and confident. Ellington had the most miners in Northumberland and had about 2,300 miners' families to try to feed. This was an enormous task to take on, but they did it against all odds. The families were scattered all over the area; some living at Alnwick, North Shields, Cramlington, Bedlington, Blyth and Lynemouth. It took much organisation and as Union House was at Ashington, everyone from the outlying areas had to try and travel to Ashington if they needed help. As the Strike wore on there were a lot of people in need.

One helper explained "The feelings that we all experienced, some people will never understand - we became so close. We met as strangers but in the end we were more like sisters, we were one. We all learned to work together; it was all new to us."

Gwen Newton said[11]

> "When we had one of those low days there was always someone to cheer you up, it was that feeling of not being alone that kept you going. It became harder for a lot of families as the weeks turned into months, but you had to think of the future of the whole community."

At the beginning of the strike no-one realised just how long it would last, or to what lengths the Government and the N.C.B. were prepared to go to defeat the National Union of Mineworkers. The women felt that the N.U.M. had never been forgiven for being instrumental in bringing down the Heath Government, and this was a deliberate attack on Trade Unionism as a whole. They believed the confrontation with the miners had been very carefully pre-planned and stage managed since 1979.

As the hardship bit deeper, the stronger became the women's resolve. They began to march with their men, and attend rallies and meetings, learning all the time. Previously non-political, reserved women emerged as gifted orators, and spoke at meetings in order to raise money to continue the task ahead. At the end of May 1984 a women's rally was arranged by the Barnsley Women's Support Group, and over 5,000 women travelled to Barnsley from all over the British Coalfields.

Women from Kent, Wales, Scotland, the Midlands and the North East came together as Sisters - "We might have been neighbours in the same street", said one of the delegates.[12]

A massive rally in London was organised for 11th August, 1984. 23,000 working-class women converged on the City for a gigantic show of solidarity for their men. A 5 mile walk through the capital proceeded past Downing Street, where the women averted their eyes and on to Buckingham Palace to hand in a petition to bring to the attention of the Queen the plight of the miners and their families. The name "Women Against Pit Closures" was adopted and it became a new Socialist movement in this country. Friendships have been cemented with Women's Peace Movements and women in struggle internationally.

At the end of the strike Gwen Newton said

> "If they close any more pits where are the men going to go? At one time there used to be about 45,000 miners in Northumberland, now it's less than 5,000. Brenkley and Bates are going to close and the men transferred to Ellington. It just doesn't make sense because Ellington pit was over-manned before the strike started. They had an excess of 300 men. Now they are going to send about 400 men from Blyth and about 500 from Brenkley - where are they going to put them? By over-manning Ellington that also will soon be worked out. They are planning to build a nuclear power station just a few miles up the road, which will surely speed up the

closure of Ellington. There are also two other pits that have a short life span - Ashington and Whittle. Where will all these men go? We have to fight for their jobs. There is 29,000,000 tonnes of coal left unmined at Bates pit. The Government say it will be uneconomic to mine but if they put the right machines into the pit it could be made to pay. But they won't listen, they would rather put the men on the dole. If they invested £2,000,000 for new machines they could save over £4,000,000 a year dole money and our men would still have their jobs and their pride."

Throughout the coal dispute of 1984 and 1985, discussion ranged over the question of colliery closures and the meaning of the terms "exhaustion" and "economic" when applied to coal mines. The Strike ended without a settlement of this matter.

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CHAPTER SIX

BATES COLLIERY - BLYTH

A CASE STUDY

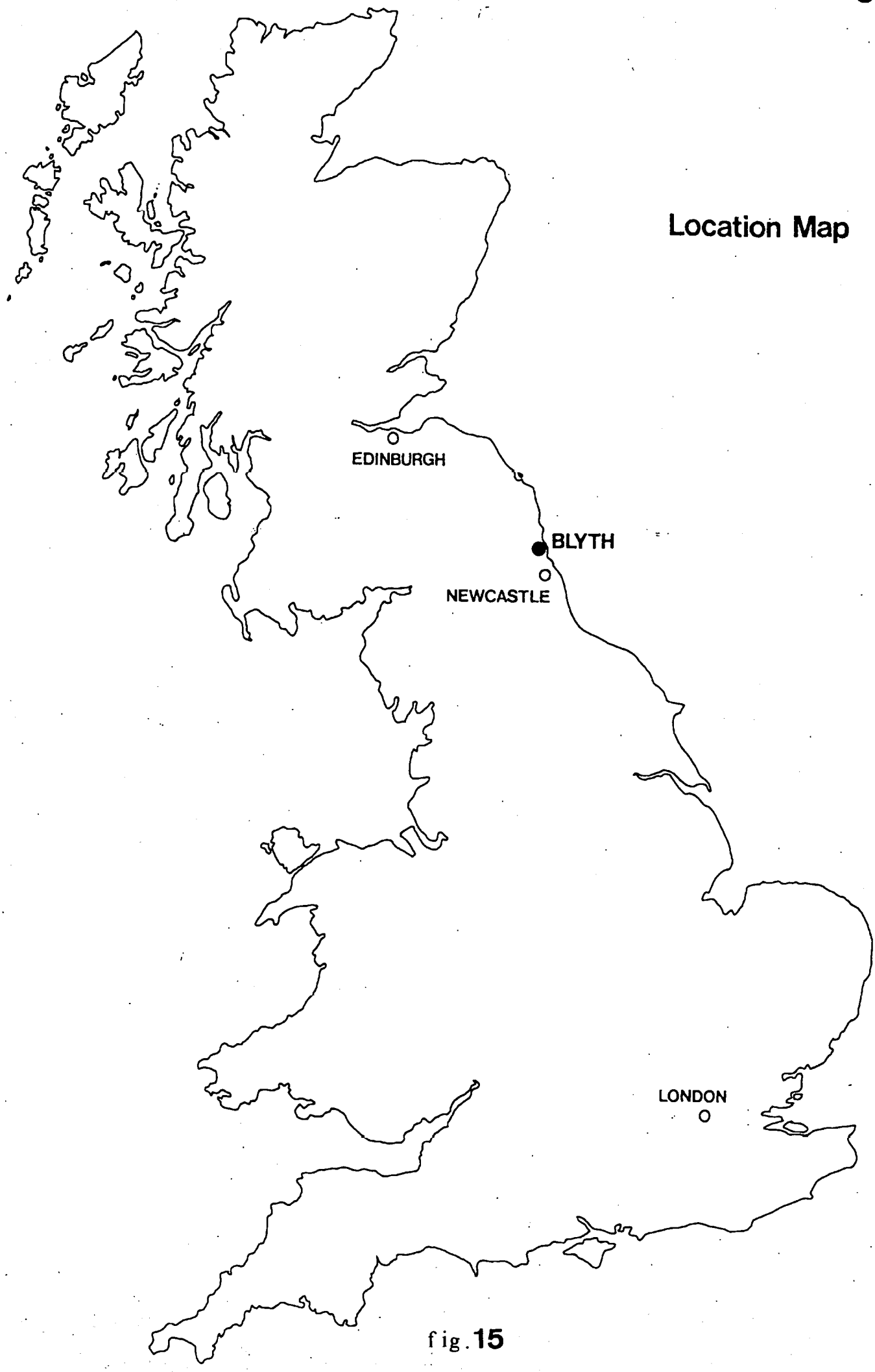


fig.15

THE BOROUGH OF BLYTH VALLEY

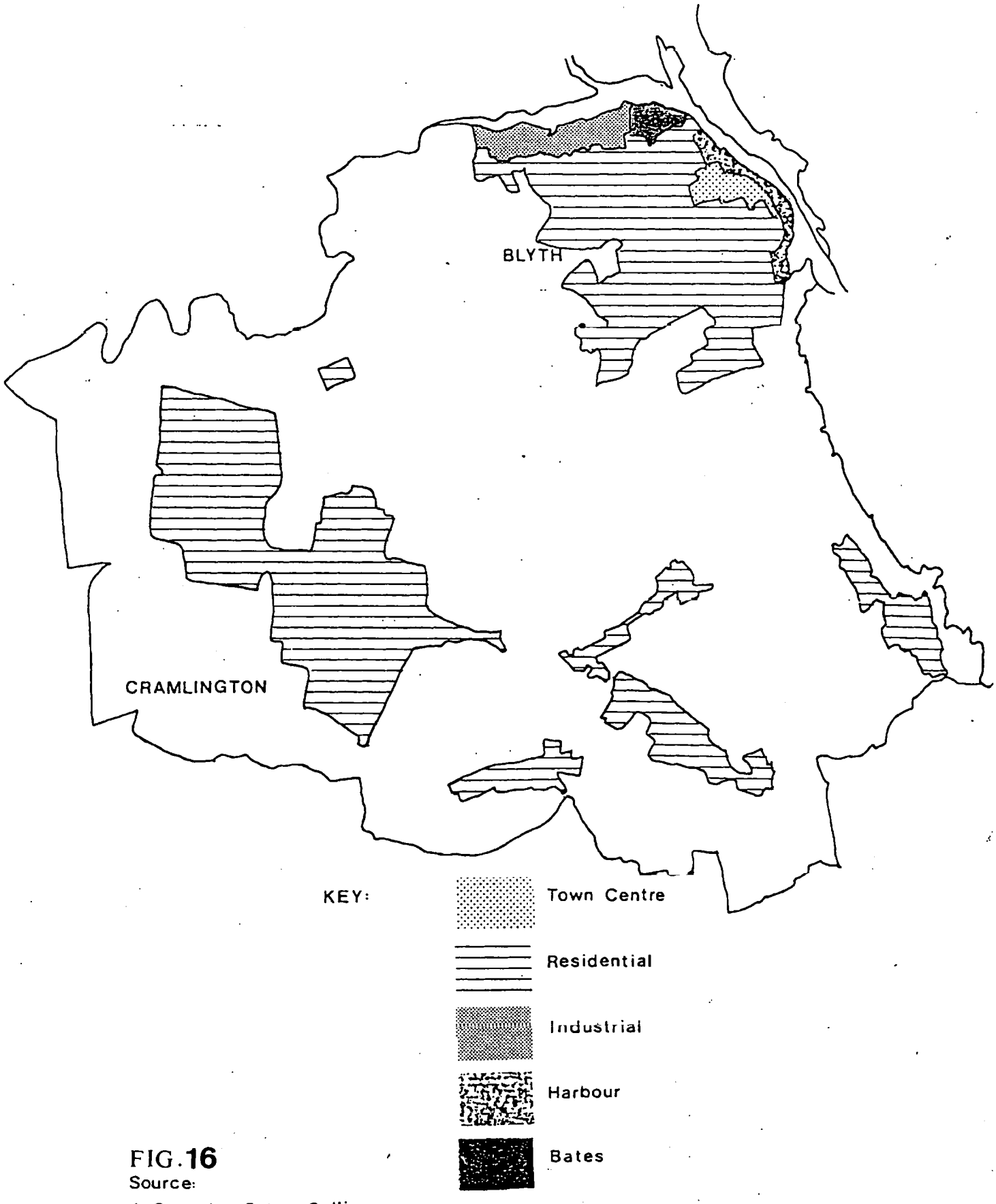


FIG.16
Source:
A Case for Bates Colliery

An example of a pit closed on uneconomic grounds is Bates Colliery in Blyth, Northumberland (See Figs. 15 and 16). During the "strike" the N.C.B. produced a "secret" policy document for discussion. This document, dated October 1984, suggested that despite a reasonable quantity of reserves (almost 29m tonnes) at Bates Colliery, only 2.5m tonnes were considered as workable since most of the reserves were in the Three-Quarter (R) seam and from their considered experience, had not proved a successful workable proposition. On the 7th May, 1985 the N.C.B. announced that Bates Colliery would be a "manpower reservoir" with the manpower being offered voluntary redundancy or transfers to other pits and this action did not amount to closure. On the 22nd May 1985 the N.C.B. announced the closure of Bates Colliery, as according to the N.C.B.'s Area Director "he no longer saw any justification for keeping the pit open."

THE AREA

Blyth Valley is situated in the South East of Northumberland with the North Sea coast forming its eastern boundary.

The Borough covers the smallest area (7031 hectares) of any of the District Councils in Northumberland, but has the highest population (78,200). The main population centres are the town of Blyth (population, 35,000) on the south bank of the River Blyth (which means "gentle" or "merry") and the new town of Cramlington (population 30,000) in the west. There are a number of small villages, formerly mining settlements, in the South and East of the Borough.

Bates Colliery occupied a site on the North-West of Blyth town, in a riverside industrial zone adjacent to the residential area of Cowpen.

COAL MINING IN THE BLYTH AREA

Coal mining is the traditional industry of Blyth Valley, and has been in the past its main source of employment. The earliest record of mines in Cowpen, Blyth is in 1315 - the mines then being directed from the convent at Tynemouth. Coal mining continued spasmodically through the centuries; mining the seam, locally known as the Moorland Seam - lying at a depth of about 8 fathoms below the surface near Cowpen Village, and at about 20 fathoms near Cowpen North Pit. The next point of interest we find in 1649, when William Gray, in his Chorographia, reflects on the uncertainty of coal mining in the district and sums up his observations with the remark that colliery owning constitutes "a great change, the profit uncertain" !

Before this, in 1615, there are recorded references to both boring and waggonways. By the end of the seventeenth century, attention was focused on Blyth as an outlet for coal. Around 1690 a Blyth Coal Company was formed. It was the Plessey waggonway which really established Blyth in a firm position as a coal-shipping port.

During the eighteenth century it was the Ridley family who dominated the coal trade at Blyth. They had secured the whole of the collieries in the Plessey district, where they

worked the Low Main seam, then known as the Plessey Main Coal, and were the owners of the only shipping quay at Blyth.

It was in 1782 that competition to this monopoly began with the sinking of a borehole on the Cowpen Estate which found the Low Main at a depth of 92 fathoms - the winning of which it was predicted, would be "attended with uncertainty, great difficulty and much expense" - despite which the winning was commenced in 1794. The men who financed this project, were Martin Morrison, Stephen Croft, John Clark (a shipping merchant), William Row and John Surtees. This sinking was the effective commencement of deep mining in Blyth. In its early days the colliery seems to have been beset with difficulties and it was found necessary to sink a further shaft near the river - the B pit - this commenced in 1804. A branch of this pit commenced in 1823 to reach the High Main Coal. However, this did not progress smoothly and ended in 1824 and the stock sold in 1825. Happily, a more fortunate undertaking was commenced when the Isabella pit was sunk in 1848, to open out the Low Main at 111 fathoms. Further collieries opened in this time - Bebside for example first worked in 1854 - the Low Main being reached at 93 fathoms in 1855 and the first cargo shipped at Blyth on 12th May of that year.[1]

As new pits were opened they were provided with railway connections with the Cramlington Co.'s line or with the Seghill Railway, which was opened in 1840 and extended to Blyth in 1847. (In 1852 this railway was incorporated as the Blyth and Tyne railway.) Although improvements in the shipping accommodation

were carried out at Blyth Harbour, they were not adequate, and the railway proved detrimental rather than beneficial to the trade of Blyth, since it provided collieries which had formerly been dependent upon Blyth with access to superior shipping points on the Tyne. In 1860 the Blyth and Tyne Railway conveyed one million and a half tons of coal, whereas the port of Blyth handled only about a quarter of a million tons, and by 1880 this was reduced to 150,000 tons. Collieries distant from the Tyne were at a severe disadvantage in competing with more accessible ones further south. The district north of Blyth in consequence remained for the most part undeveloped until adequate facilities for exporting coal had been provided close at hand.

This came in 1882, when the Blyth Harbour Commission was constituted and carried out improvements which enabled the port to emerge from its long eclipse.[2]

In 1858 the Carrs parted with the whole of their colliery interests in both Seghill and Cowpen - retaining Hartley alone. Cowpen was purchased by Joseph and John Straker, John and William Cookson, William Cuthbert, John Henderson, John and Matthew Liddell, T.E. Forster and George Baker Forster; who subsequently amalgamated with the owners of North Seaton Colliery - forming the Cowpen and North Seaton Coal Company - later to become the Cowpen Coal Company. These new men opened out the coal on the Newsham estate in 1860 - by starting the Hannah pit - which worked out the Low Main in 1877 when the

pit was laid in and used as a ventilating shaft. After the amalgamation with North Seaton in 1861, the Cowpen company acquired the royalty of Cambois and started a mine there in 1867. At Cowpen the use of the North Pit was discontinued in 1863 and in 1874 the Straker pit was sunk to the Yard Seam, the Isabella being afterwards carried down to the Beaumont seam. Croften Mill Pit was opened out in 1886 and in 1892 Mill Pit, Cowpen Colliery was sunk 14 feet diameter to the Yard and Low Main seams.[3] (See Fig. 17 for full technical details)

BATES PIT

The original shafts - North and South Pit of Bates - were sunk in 1904. In 1932 the company sank a 3rd shaft, 14 feet diameter onto the existing workings in the Hutton and Harvey Seams. The Hutton, 3 feet thick, being reached at 550 feet, and the Harvey, 2 feet 6 inches thick, at 650 feet. The Manager in 1936 was Mr. E. Johnson, the Engineer Mr. J. Addison and the agent Mr. S. Bates, after whom the colliery was named.[4]

The "Blyth News",reported on April 7th 1927 -

> "A very unwelcome sound which has been heard in Blyth at night lately, has been the bellowing of the pit buzzer to indicate that the colliery would not be working on the following day.
> Round about the district these buzzers have been sounding more often than is pleasant for those engaged in coal mining, but the Cowpen Collieries have been working since the resumption in November without a

break until last week. Since then the idle days, due to the falling away of orders, has brought to an end the boom which has existed during the last five months."[5]

MILL PIT, COWPEN COLLIERY 1892

The shaft, fourteen feet in diameter, was sunk to the Yard and Low Main seams, reached at depths of 400 and 560 feet respectively. The upper 80 feet of the shaft was "tubbed" as the ground was originally below high water springtide level. Two double-decked cages, carrying four tubs each, running on steel rail-guides, serviced the shaft.

The winding engine was a single horizontal cylinder, 36 inch bore, 6 feet stroke and drum - 14 feet diameter. The pulley wheels were 14 feet diameter mounted on a steel girder head gear. The tubs used in the pit weighed 8 cwts and carried 12½ cwts of coal. The ropes were (plough) steel and 5¼ inch circumference. (Presumably this refers to the winding ropes).

Owing to the congested site of the mine the screening plant was 220 feet from the shaft. The tubs were moved by a creeper on a gradient of 1 in 7 rising to a height of 24 feet. The creeper was driven by a 10 inch bore engine at its head-end, and moved at a speed of 47 feet per minute, dealing with 240 tubs per hour.

There were two "Robinson" washers on the surface which had capacities of 250 and 100 tons.

The underground haulage was an endless rope driven from the surface. The rope moved under the tubs which were attached by clips to the rope.

The pumping apparatus was a 12 inch bore air-compressing engine at bank which worked four "Evans" Cornish pumps. The main pumping engine was at 'A' pit and had a 72 inch bore cylinder, and a 9 feet stroke, and worked 24 inch sets to a depth of 115 fathoms.

Ventilation in the mine was by means of a 40 feet "Waddle" fan at "H". pit, situated a mile and a quarter away. The fan gave 90,000 cubic feet of air per minute, (w/g ? 1. 30 ins ?) revolving at 45 r.p.m.

The Low Main Seam was mostly worked under the sea, using both bord and pillar and longwall systems. The seam was 4-5 feet thick.

The Yard Seam, 2 feet 9 inches - 3 feet in thickness, was worked entirely longwall and gave up about 1,000 tons of coal per day.

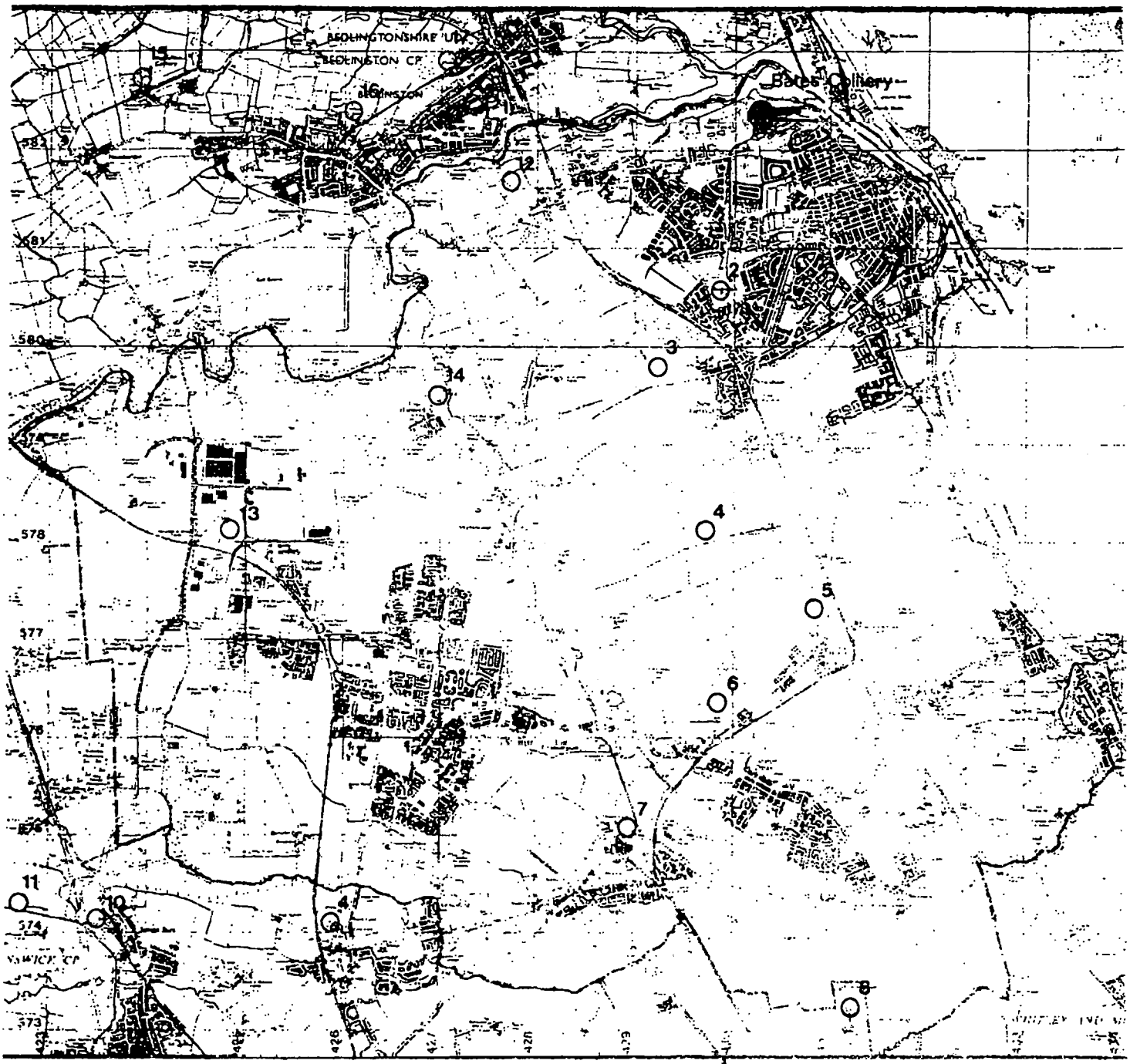
Information from Mr. H. Beavis, taken from the "Transactions of the N. of E. M. & M. E." Volume XLI page IV, August 1892.

Source: Northumberland Records Office, Newcastle upon Tyne.

FIG. 17

During the 1930's however, the centre of gravity of production had been shifting northwards, a movement from which the port of Blyth benefited at the expense of the Tyne. Blyth increased its shipments of coal in spite of the depression and in 1934 established record levels.[6]

Blyth Valley was the heartland of the mid-Northumberland coalfield. In 1947 - Nationalisation (vesting day), 7,170 men worked at 11 pits within the present Borough area, and residents of the Borough were associated with 17 peripheral pits (See Fig.18). After Nationalisation, there was a limited period of expansion, but output and manpower began to decline after 1957 (See Figs.19 and 20). Despite this, in 1961 seven out of ten residents within Blyth Valley were employed in coal mining, but by 1970 this was reduced to just over half. At the time of the 1981 Census, Bates Colliery employed 1892 people, representing 1 in 3 of the total male workforce or 1 in 8 of the resident workforce in the town.



Borough of Blyth Valley

Colliery Locations

1947 - 1985

1.	Mill	10.	Seaton Burn
2.	Isabella	11.	Brenkley
3.	New Delaval	12.	Horton Grange
4.	Gloria	13.	Nelson
5.	New Hartley	14.	Hartford
6.	Seaton Delaval	15.	Netherton
7.	Seghill	16.	Bedlington 'D'
8.	Fenwick	17.	Bedlington 'A'
9.	Dudley		

FIG.18

Borough Planning Officer,
Council Offices,
Seaton Delaval,
Whitley Bay,
Tyne & Wear.
Telephone: 091 237 5480780.

COLLIERIES IN THE BLYTH VALLEY AND PERIPHERAL AREAS SHOWING MANPOWER 1947 TO CLOSURE OR PRESENT TIME

Existing Boundaries of Blyth Valley Borough Council

COLLIERY	Date of Opening & Closure	1947	1960	1974	1978	1983	At Closure
BATES	1904 - 31.5.86	1195	1673	1789	1671	1735	880
GLORIA	1935 - 1.6.51.	290	-	-	-	-	300
HARTFORD	1866 - 24.2.61.	740	634	-	-	-	634
HARTLEY	1872 - 20.2.59.	530	-	-	-	-	389
HORTON GRANGE	1853 - 26.1.62.	540	395	-	-	-	395
ISABELLA (COWPEN)	1848 - 12.2.66.	100	515	-	-	-	407
MILL	1885 - 12.7.69.	890	846	-	-	-	802
NELSON	1934 - 4.1.58.	450	-	-	-	-	258
NEW DELAVAL	1859 - 2.4.58.	425	-	-	-	-	230
SEATON DELAVAL	1838 - 27.5.60.	820	-	-	-	-	405
SEGHILL	1865 - 28.9.62.	1190	1024	-	-	-	1024
Peripheral Pits							
ALGERNON	1784 - 19.2.66	680	645	-	-	-	333
ASHINGTON	1866 - 25.3.88	3600	3264	1119	903	813	350
BEDLINGTON 'A'	1838 - 25.9.71	940	840	-	-	-	568
BEDLINGTON 'D'	1854 - 2.3.68.	1040	754	-	-	-	549
BEDLINGTON 'E'	1860 - 16.3.62.	970	410	-	-	-	410
BEDLINGTON 'F'	1905 - 23.10.65	730	599	-	-	-	555
BRENKLEY	1954 - 3012.85	-	413	617	659	639	639
CAMBOIS	1866 - 20.4.68.	1015	1196	-	-	-	818
DUDLEY	1854 - 29.4.77.	780	675	499	-	-	417
ECCLES	1814 - 19.7.80.	730	693	504	517	-	526
ELLINGTON	1913 -	1550	1450	1563	1729	2179	Still Open
FENWICK	1860 - 1.9.73.	810	808	-	-	-	609
LYNEMOUTH	1927/34 - 1.8.82.	870	1623	1823	1848	-	1527
MAUDE	1814 - 2.12.60.	805	-	-	-	-	728
NORTH SEATON	1859 - 20.1.61.	340	-	-	-	-	340
SEATON BURN	1844 - 17.8.63.	241	-	-	-	-	241
WOODHORN	1897 - 1.8.81.	1754	618	597	-	-	486
NETHERTON	1836 - 4.1.74.	765	468	-	-	-	626

SOURCE: Colliery Guardian "Guide to the Coalfields"

1947 +

FIG. 19

MAIN TRANSFERS TO BATES COLLIERY	
COLLIERY	MONTH/YEAR
ISABELLA	FEBRUARY, 1955
NEW DELAVAL	APRIL, 1955
HARTLEY	APRIL, 1957
NELSON	JANUARY, 1958
HORTON GRANGE	APRIL, 1958
HORTON GRANGE	JANUARY, 1959
BEDLINGTON	JANUARY, 1959
HARTFORD	FEBRUARY, 1961
SEGHILL	MAY, 1961
HORTON GRANGE	OCTOBER, 1961
HORTON GRANGE	JANUARY, 1962
CAMBOIS	FEBRUARY, 1964
ISABELLA	FEBRUARY, 1965
ISABELLA	MAY, 1965
ISABELLA	MAY, 1966
LYNEMOUTH	NOVEMBER, 1966
BEDLINGTON 'O'	FEBRUARY, 1966
MILL	JULY, 1968
LINTON	NOVEMBER, 1968
MILL	JULY, 1969
LONGHIRST	MARCH, 1969
BEDLINGTON 'A'	SEPTEMBER, 1971
BEDLINGTON 'A'	JANUARY, 1972
FENWICK	SEPTEMBER, 1973
NETHERTON	JANUARY, 1974
BURRADON	NOVEMBER, 1975
DUDLEY	MAY, 1975
ECCLES	JULY, 1980
BOLDON	JUNE, 1981
BOLDON	SEPTEMBER, 1982
LYNEMOUTH	JANUARY, 1983

Source: N.C.B.

FIG. 20

THE LOCAL ECONOMY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

In common with most of the North East, Blyth Valley has suffered persistent structural unemployment over the past 50 years. The situation has been worsened by the accelerated contraction of coal mining since 1960 and the effect of the current recession on newer industries in the manufacturing sector.

Blyth has one of the highest rates of unemployment for adult males in the northern region - standing at 21% prior to Bates Closure[7] In July 1985, nearly 50% of those unemployed in Blyth were under 30 years of age and 17% were under 20 years of age. The length of time of unemployment was also increasing. At that time 57% of unemployed men had been out of work for six months and 42% for over twelve months. In the 45+ age group 50% had been unemployed for more than one year. 50% of school leavers were entering Government Training Schemes. Jobs available at local Job Centres were mostly part-time and in the retail trade. Jobs were not suitable for redundant mineworkers locally. Predictions of male unemployment of up to 30% were made,[8] taking into account direct and indirect effects of closure. In addition, female job losses (dependent on low/high income multipliers, discussed in previous chaper) of between 122 and 489 were predicted.

Therefore the loss of the colliery with the original 1500 jobs would have serious implications for unemployment amongst males in Blyth. In addition to these direct job losses, there would also be substantial secondary effects. The closure would affect

associated industries supplying the colliery and local services. Based upon numerous studies on the secondary effects of colliery closures elsewhere in the country, it was estimated that one job would be lost in associated companies and local service industries for every 4 jobs lost at Bates Colliery. This would result in a loss of a further 225 jobs and would have the effect of further increasing unemployment levels in the town of Blyth to between 24% and 27%.

A STUDY IS COMMISSIONED

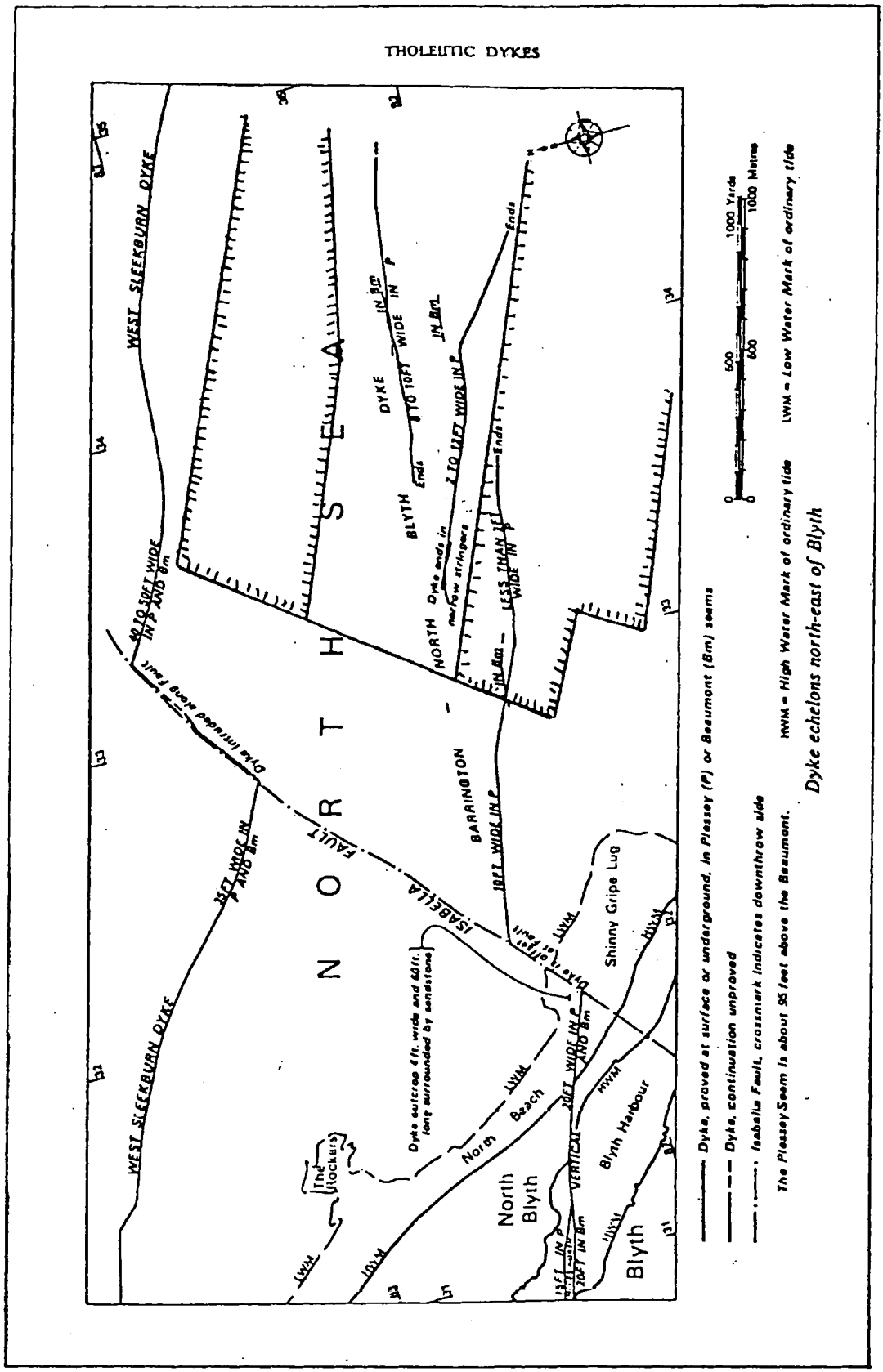
To verify these predictions and to increase local knowledge of the effects of closure the Borough of Blyth Valley Council commissioned Dr. Eric Wade, Staff Tutor in Social Science of The Open University in Newcastle upon Tyne and expert on coal reserves in Northumberland to undertake a study of coal mining and employment in Blyth Valley. He employed a part-time research assistant to help with this study, namely M.A.Hutchinson, the author of this thesis. This all took place in December, 1984 after the previously mentioned N.C.B. "secret" policy document hinted at the run-down of Bates Colliery. The study had two major aims:

(a) to make a case for the continued production of coal at Bates Colliery.

(b) to examine the social and financial implications of the proposed closure.

The nature of the research changed dramatically during the study. The original aim of the study was to complete the research twelve months after the starting date on 1st January, 1985. In May, 1985, the N.C.B. announced that Bates Colliery was to close. Therefore, from that time the study became very "action" orientated to try and prove the productive capacity of Bates Colliery and also prove the subsequent "knock-on" effects of the closure. The author was predominantly concerned with producing the two addenda to the Study, namely Addendum I: An Industrial Survey and Addendum II: The Unquantifiable Costs of the Proposed Closure of Bates Colliery. (See Figs. 21, 22 and 23).

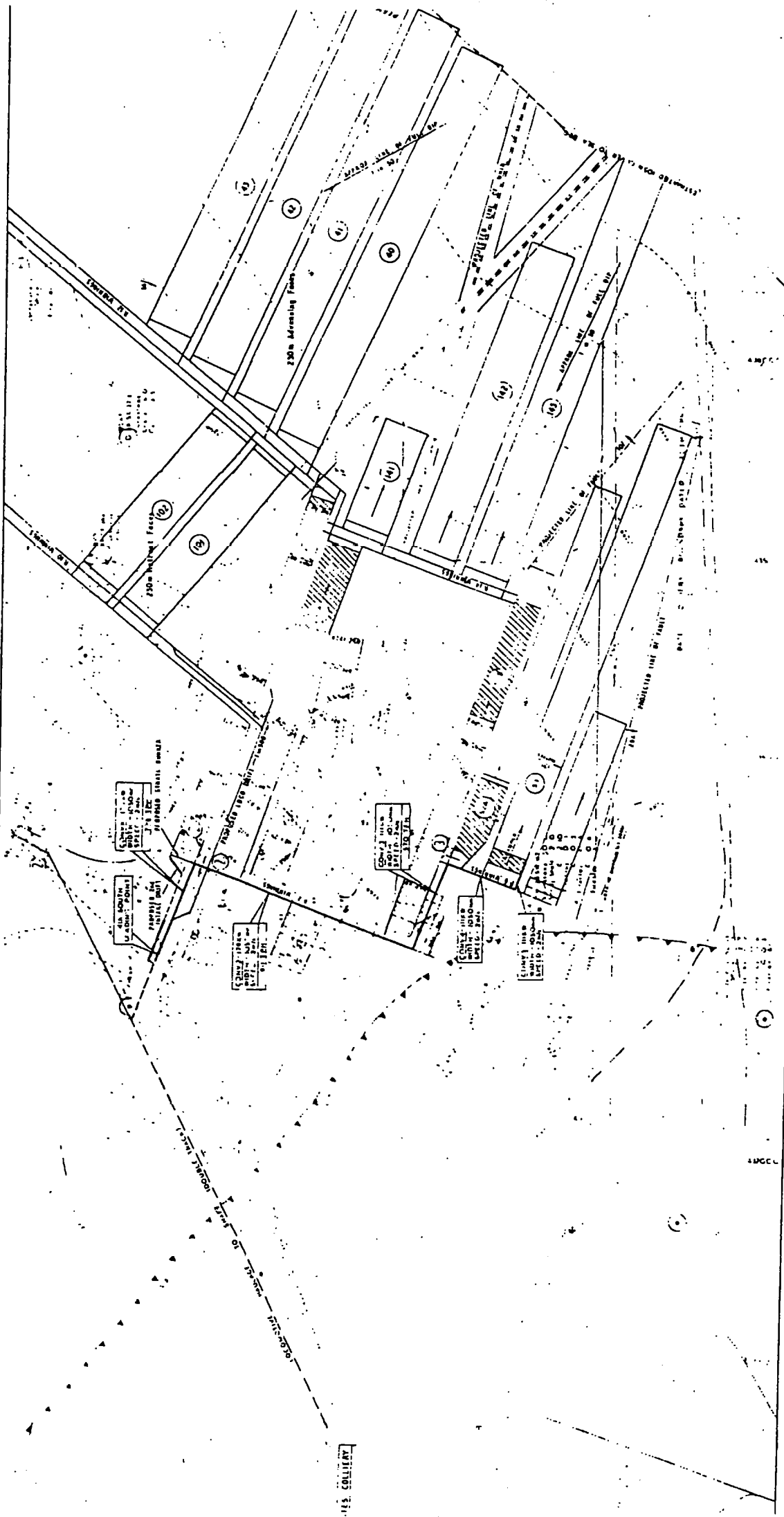
& 24



Three Quarter (R) Seam Workings.

Source: N.C.B.

FIG. 21



Proposed Workings in Three Quarter (R) Seams, 15.2.1984.

Source: N.C.B.

Fig. 22

Operating Results at Bates Colliery 1975 - 1984

	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Annual Saleable Output (000's Tonnes)	835	870	770	743	727	819	691	890	799	763
Saleable Output/Day (Tonnes)	3507	3702	3291	3202	3043	3514	2967	3836	3430	3206
Average Overal OMS (Tonnes)	2.18	2.34	2.10	2.04	1.99	2.22	1.82	2.35	2.19	2.15
Average Face OMS (Tonnes)	5.40	5.76	5.26	5.32	5.31	5.59	5.25	6.67	6.49	6.27
Average Manpower	1779	1767	1762	1756	1701	1733	1762	1752	1686	1637

SOURCE: NCB

Fig.23

Operating Results R.53's Face 1982 - 1983

	Sept.82	Oct.82	Dec.82	March 82	June 82
Average Advance Day (M)	6.81	1.88	2.20	3.02	3.10
Saleable Output per Day	350	440	460	696	788
Face OMS (Saleable)	4.93	5.47	7.55	9.61	10.75

Operating Results R.53'2 Face August, 1983

	M/C Shifts per week	Average Advance per week M.	M/C Shifts	Tonne Per Day	Tonne Per Week	OMS
Aug. 1983	9.5	12.76	402	765	3826	10.74
Best Week 4 Days	8.0	15.4	8	1287	5565	16.13

Source: N.C.B.

Fig.24

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CHAPTER SIX

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STUDY AND THE CAMPAIGN

In December, 1984, the Borough of Blyth Valley had invited Dr. Eric Wade of The Open University to conduct an investigation into the social and economic effects of the proposed closure of Bates Colliery, Blyth, Northumberland, as stated in the previous chapter. Dr. Wade had also worked closely with Bates Colliery N.U.M. branch to demonstrate that a large proportion of the remaining reserves at Bates Colliery (29 million tonnes) could be worked.

The Study progressed steadily until 7 May, 1985, when the N.C.B. announced Bates was to become a "manpower reservoir". Suddenly, all the information the Study had so far uncovered was urgently needed for the "Save Bates" Campaign launched by the Borough of Blyth Valley. An Interim Report was hurriedly compiled on 7 May,1985 for an emergency Council Meeting.

This Report pointed out

> "Bates Colliery is the last Pit to survive closure in the Borough. Bates opened in 1904 and the manpower figures for the pit ran as follows:-

1947	1960	1974	1978	1983	1985
1195	1673	1784	1671	1735	1525

> The Pit produces 650,000 tonnes per annum of industrial fuels and at present 3 seams are being worked; the

Brass Thill (K) Seam, the Hutton (L) Seam and the Three-Quarter (R) Seam.

The age-range of the man-power on 16.3.85 =

Under 30	30/39	40/49	50/54	55+	Total
459	377	397	187	105	1525

Even assuming every N.C.B. employee in Northumberland above the age of 50 accepted redundancy, this would leave 1233 Bates employees looking for 1003 potential vacancies.

In March, 1985 a 3-page questionnaire was sent to 300 randomly selected employees to gain extensive information on Travel to Work Patterns; Mobility; Future; Shopping Patterns; Spending Patterns; Housing; Heating and Community Structure. In January, 1985 a questionnaire was sent to 120 local firms and 20 mining related companies outside Blyth Valley. Details were obtained of expansion plans; annual turnover taken by N.C.B. and Bates; methods of heating used and the effect of the Strike. Also gathered was extensive information on the effect Closure would have on the Housing Dept. in Blyth and the effect on the Rates.

It was discovered the economic cost of the closure of Bates Colliery would be £243,878 weekly or £12,681,656 per year. In Blyth Valley alone £600,000 weekly or £32 M in the Northumberland Coalfield Area. A £5 M investment plan would provide work for 900 men into the 21st Century, whereas closure would sterilise coal worth more than £1,000 M. There is evidence to suggest that

the losses of £209,000 per week at Bates Colliery would be considerably reduced or even completely eliminated, given the correct investment and the management determination to work the colliery. It is possible that even a small surplus could be achieved.

Conclusion It seems rather surprising that the N.C.B. wish to close Bates Colliery, after efforts were made to improve working conditions in the Three-Quarter Seam. In 1984, mining experts were confident in working three faces per day, with an overall output of 3,000 tonnes per day. Further more it was planned to develop the Three-Quarter Seam in an area north of the West Sleekburn whin dyke, where proven favourable geological conditions exist. In the area north of the West Sleekburn dyke the bulk of the reserves lie. If they are not worked they will become sterilised. The value of these reserves at present day prices is £1,044,000,000."[1]

CAMPAIGN PLAN

At the Emergency Borough of Blyth Valley Council Meeting on 9th May, 1985, a Campaign Plan was drawn up, as follows:-

1. Meet with Bates Colliery N.U.M.
2. Council Meeting - formation of Bates Action Committee
3. Dr. Wade's Report - Update and bring forward.
4. Coalfield Community Campaign - Wed. 15.5.85.
   Councillors, Wilkinson/Burt to Durham.
   Councillors, Gordon/Campbell to London.
5. Campaign:-
   (a) Public Meeting to involve: N.U.M.
   Wives Support Group
   Blyth Harbour Commission
   Industrialists
   Chamber of Trade
   Community Associations.
   (b) Parliamentary Lobby: To involve Members of Parliament (Messrs. Orme, Dormund, Ryman and Thompson)
   (c) Downing Street Petition.
   (d) Meet N.C.B. nationally (Hobart House)
   (e) Meet N.C.B. locally (Mr. Archibold)
   (f) European M.P. - Dr. Gordon Adam.

On May 10th 1985 the "Evening Chronicle" reported this Plan and Headlines read "BITTER BATTLE PROMISE ON BATES". The article read "Miners and Councillors campaigning to save their town's last pit have promised to take their fight to the Prime Minister. An action committee to fight the closure of Bates Colliery in Blyth was set up by the borough council last night. Council leader, Coun. Ian Gordon promised the committee will take the battle to Downing

Street and Parliament. Members of the council approved the plan to set up the five-man committee which will include Coun. Gordon and Coun. Ronnie Campbell, who is also chairman of the Bates N.U.M. branch... ... (Now M.P. for Blyth).

One target for the Save Bates campaign must be the E.E.C. as it is allowing cheap coal from abroad to flood the U.K. market and destroy the industry here. He warned 'multi-national companies are buying stakes in coal production abroad in the hope of making a killing when the British industry is run down.'

Alliance members of Blyth Valley called on the action group to find out what cash aid would be available to the borough if the pit closed down, but the ruling Labour group refused to make this part of the action group's plan, saying such a move admitted defeat. ... ... (plans for lobbying M.P.'s and details of Open University Report) ... ... Meanwhile, Northumbria's Euro M.P. Gordon Adam has called for a public inquiry to be held to decide the colliery's future."[2]

CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

Two weeks earlier Dr. Gordon Adam had spoken at the North East Coalfields Facing Change Conference, held in Blyth Valley. He said "There are no reserves of money to rescue the mining industry. 1984 figures for production aid had increased by 26% overall. The current figures for production aid were £7.4 per tonne in Germany.

£10.93 per tonne in U.K.

£21.01 per tonne in France.

£21.24 per tonne in Belgium.

Overall amount = £2,000 Million production aid.

A leaked document in Germany said there would be an end to production aid by the end of the century. No less than one third of the world trade in coal is in the hands of the world oil companies and is a major threat to the coal industry. Since 1973 Oil Companies such as Exon, Shell, Mobil, B.P., Total, Oxidental in many places such as Colombia, Canada, S. Africa, Botswana and China have been building up their control of coal trade. Every scheme to change from oil to coal has to be publicised and the market for coal directed at the small industrial user. In Denmark there are a group of 2,000 houses which has its own boiler plant in the middle, which serves hot water and heating to these houses, operating as a community unit. This type of model could be adopted here. There has been a tremendous link-up with Unions from other countries recently and if we keep our eye firmly on target; keep back the threat of imports; fight the N.C.B., and remember the need for specific investment and the need to boost coal, we can move into the 21st Century with this industry intact."

Dr. E. Wade was also at the Conference and picked up on the European points adding "An average German coal mine would employ 5,000 men. The location would be in an Urban area e.g. the Ruhr. The employees are mainly Turkish and Yugoslavian people who are 'guestworkers'. They equal 40% of the workforce. The Ruhr would benefit from the closure of the N.E. Coalfield, as it did when Consett Steelworks closed."

David Sadler from Durham University compared the decline of the steel industry with that of the coal industry and stated "there are grim similarities"[3]. He has since written a book on the subject.

This Conference aired the concerns of imminent closure and increased the knowledge of the delegates ready for the fight that was to come so soon.

THE N.U.M. PLAN A STRATEGY

Returning to the agitation experienced after the 7th May announcement, the N.U.M. held a meeting at the Croften and Cowpen Miners' Welfare Club.[4] Alec Turner (Branch Secretary) said

> "The N.C.B. gave an assurance that no pit will close until the colliery Review Procedure is carried out."

He urged the men not to flock for transfer and redundancy as this would give the N.C.B. the chance to say "you closed the pit yourselves". Ronnie Campbell pointed out that there is no settled future in any other pit, so there's nothing to be gained by transferring. "We have to fight for Bates".

Dr. Wade gave some brief details of the five pits in Northumberland:-

"Whittle - A single-seam pit. It might last ten years, but they would have to sink new drifts to a depth of 2,000 feet to go on for any longer, and this would take 8 years.

Ashington - The Three-Quarter seam is nearly exhausted. The only reserves are in the former Linton Colliery - Newmore Fault. No more than 5 years left. Ashington was once one of the largest pits in the country.

Ellington - the 1/5th largest in the country (the "Jewel in the Crown"). However, it is overmanned and the N.C.B. want to reduce the manpower by 250. There are vast reserves of coal near Hauxley, and some would say Hauxley Pit should never have been closed, but a new pit or modern transport systems is needed

to mine it. Ellington has 10-15 years left.

Brenkley - Small pit and only 2 years of coal left.

Bates - The Three-Quarter Seam has difficulties. If a north-east road was driven it would give superior coal at higher selling prices. There are good bore-holes to the south-east. If the Whyn Dyke was opened the supplies would be very long lasting."

Ronnie Campbell felt the Management had been deliberately sabotaging the pit for years. He gave five examples:

1. The 5-Year Plan has not been used properly and decisions have been made day-to-day with no overall planning.

2. The Pit has been used as an "Experimental Pit". Support systems have been used that were known to be wrong for Bates, just to try them out for other pits.

3. A good face was closed because of a temporary water problem when they hit a dip, which could have been easily overcome. A good 7 foot coal face was stopped for nothing.

4. Retreat mining would answer the Three-Quarter seam problem. If time could have been given to go in and then pull out the coal in retreat.

5. A railway system was bought a few years ago

for transporting equipment and men, but it was just left standing and not installed."

A Mass Meeting was arranged for 18th May, to bring the fighting spirit to keep the Pit open, to other Unions.

The Branch prepared a plan to put to Coal Minister, David Hunt which incorporated some of the Colliery Manager's proposals. The plan involved 600 transfers and redundancies to produce a saving of £3M. and further savings on production costs to reduce the annual loss of £3.5M. Alec Turner hoped that this compromise would keep the colliery running for another 25 years at a profit.

The result of this proposal brought David Hunt to Bates Colliery on 20th May, 1985 to talk to the men and Bates N.U.M. Branch. John Whiteman, Branch Financial Secretary, said in the "News Post Leader"[6]

"The meeting was very hopeful. The Minister promised that if the Bates Closure was formally announced, it would have to go through the agreed review procedure of consultations with unions. We told him how we can cut losses at the pit and he agreed to have a good look at our proposals. He will then give us his decision."

In the same newspaper Alec Turner reported that

" The N.C.B. are mounting a psychological scare campaign to frighten miners into seeking a transfer from Bates. Men are being told that if they withdraw

their transfer forms they will never get the opportunity again."

Also in the same newspaper there was a long article giving the N.C.B.'s perspective headlined "There is No Justification in Keeping Bates Open". The Area Director, Mr. David Archibald said

"Out of 1423 industrial workers at Bates, 451 have applied for transfer, 303 are already on redundancy notice and a further 228 have enquired about redundancy. Of these 228, 110 will be granted redundancy this week.

The N.C.B. went on to stress geological problems, the poor quality of the coal and the heavy burden of losses.

The M.P. for Blyth, John Ryman wrote to David Hunt to also put forward a case for Bates. (See letters received in reply Fig. 25). These replies emphasised the N.C.B.'s argument.

On May 22nd, 1985 Mr. David Archibald, announced the closure of Bates Colliery. There was no more mention of "Manpower Reservoirs" and the N.U.M. refused to accept the "closure".

As this bitter battle proceeded the "Save Bates Campaign" organised a March and Rally which took place on May 25, 1985 at Croft Park, Blyth, attended by Arthur Scargill as the main speaker, who urged the men to "take up the cudgels and fight this Tory Government".

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PARLIAMENTARY UNDER
SECRETARY OF STATE

Sam Scott Esq
General Secretary
NUM North East Area
Burt Hall
Newcastle-upon-Tyne

18th May 1985

Dear Mr Scott

Thank you for arranging the meeting I had yesterday with representatives of the men at Bates colliery.

I confirm that at the meeting the men handed me what they believed to be a viable alternative plan for the future of the colliery and I agreed to pass this to the Area Director, Mr Archibald, for consideration. I had an immediate discussion with Mr Archibald when he explained that this plan had already been carefully considered and rejected. Mr Archibald did however agree to look at the document over the weekend and to consider it carefully in the light of the further representations made.

I confirmed the clear assurance given by the National Coal Board that any decision relating to the closure of Bates will be dealt with within the review procedure - either as it exists today or under a modified procedure if agreement can be reached between the Board and the Unions.

Yours sincerely

David Hunt

Fig. 25

DAVID HUNT

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PARLIAMENTARY UNDER
SECRETARY OF STATE

John Ryman Esq MP
House of Commons
LONDON
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15th May 1985

Dear John

In support of your application for a debate under Standing Order No 10 on Wednesday 8 May, you made a number of points to which I feel I should respond.

On the general question of pit closures, you made allegations about Ministerial involvement which are wholly untrue. The Government has set a sensible financial objective for the National Coal Board; it does not manage the industry and decisions on the future of individual pits are entirely for the NCB.

On Bates colliery in particular, let me set out the facts as I understand them from the Board. There has been no formal proposal to close the colliery; at an Area Consultative Council meeting on Tuesday the area director said that Bates and Horden collieries would be used as manpower reservoirs from which men can transfer to allow voluntary redundancies at those long life pits in the area which will form the base for the long term future of the coalfield. The Board will need to assess the response to the invitiation to men to transfer, and there will be further discussions on the pit's future at general colliery review meetings. If closure is proposed for Bates, or for any other pit, the Board have said that the Colliery Review Procedure will be used.

You mentioned the reserves remaining at Bates. It has become increasingly apparent to the Board that they will not be able to work those reserves efficiently because of severe geological problems. During the strike Bates lost equipment with a replacement value in excess of £1 million and conditions deteriorated so badly that it has cost the Board £¼ million merely to regain entry. Most of the remaining reserves lie in the Three Quarter seam where the R53s face on which so many hopes had been pinned has failed in spite of investme of £1.7 million in heavy duty steel roof supports.

For the past 16 years Bates has made consistent heavy losses, and dur the past 7 years has lost £60.9 million. It is the Board's view that, even with further financial investment, it would continue to make consistent heavy losses for the foreseeable future. Far

from the coal being good quality as you asserted, it is poor with a high ash content and can command only a low market price.

Let me assure you that it is the Board's view that only by concentrating on long life pits will they be able to contribute to the good of the wider community. Miners still have the guarantee of no compulsory redundancies, and those men who choose to leave the industry will receive not only generous redundancy payments but will have available advice and assistance including the opportunity for retraining, under the Board's enterprise initiative.

Yesterday I had the opportunity of discussing the situation on Bates with men from the Colliery when I made a visit to Ellington Complex. I enclose a letter which I have today sent to Sam Scott who was present.

Yours sincerely

DAVID HUNT

COALFIELDS COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN

Coincidentally, the launch date in the North for the above Campaign had been planned for 15th May 1985. This dovetailed very nicely with the "Save Bates Campaign" and the Publicity Officer at Blyth Valley Council had a very busy few weeks making sure that all these events were covered in the press, and on radio and television.

The aims of the Campaign were to promote the needs of mining communities to the N.C.B. and the Government. The eight North-East councils were asked to donate £500 towards the cost of the campaign. Other members were 4 Councils in the North-West; 14 from Wales; and 11 from Scotland. Patrons were sought that would have some impact on the Government e.g. James Callahan; Lord Ezra; Lord Gormley; Barbara Castle; Cardinal Hume; and the Universities of Durham and Cambridge. The immediate task in the initial eight weeks of the campaign was to lobby Government to commit themselves to a coal energy policy.[5]

On 15th May the Coalfields Community Campaign was officially launched at the old Town Hall, Durham and chaired by Councillor Elliot Wilkinson (Blyth Valley). The national launch in London was going ahead at the same time. The Campaign represented 16 million men, women and children; 1.16 million unemployed and 254,000 businesses. The Lord Bishop of Durham was in attendance and he stressed the importance of the research being carried out

in the fight to save the mining communities, saying

"We are raising hard facts, and are raising hard questions. The Government is taking a very narrow view both socially and economically".

Huw Beynon (Durham University) said

"In the 60's people could go into industrial jobs. Now the situation is different. There are astronomic levels of unemployment. It may soon be 30% across the whole of the North. It is a disgrace for young people. We have to be aware of the threat of the Open-cast system. 1.3M tonnes (20%) in the North East comes out of the Open-cast sites. The scale of applications for private (profit-motivated) opencast is worrying."

Dr. E. Wade (The Open University) said

"The markets are different in Northumberland and Durham - steam and coking coals respectively. It is a sad fact that the Durham pits could have produced coal that could have supplied the Teesside steel works, and Northumberland coal could have supplied Blyth Power Station, but the N.C.B. in its wisdom has chosen to run them both down."

PROGRESS?

Many more meetings of the Bates Colliery Action Committee took place in early June, and Dr. Wade presented many more Interim Reports of the Study explaining the technicalities of working the Three-Quarter (R) seam to produce an acceptable run of coal, and analyses of coal quality, markets and selling prices.

The Unions had made legal history by taking out an Injunction against the N.C.B. to force them to make the plan to close Bates subject to the established colliery review procedure, as the N.C.B. persisted in pursuing the rundown of both production and staff in breach of the Colliery Review procedure. At the High Court on Thursday 6th June, 1985, lawyers for the N.C.B. gave the assurance that was required.

The N.C.B. agreed to follow the colliery review procedure and do nothing to predetermine the outcome of the procedure. The N.C.B. were now committed to maintaining the fabric of the pit and stabilising the workforce at 900 men. This N.C.B. turn-round was achieved after all the Unions at Blyth joined together in a united action to take the N.C.B. to court.

THE PARLIAMENTARY LOBBY

The Members of the Delegation to attend the London Lobby on 19th June, 1985 were selected to represent Blyth Valley Borough Council; Northumberland County Council; Wansbeck District Council; Blyth Valley Council Officers; the N.U.M., N.A.C.O.D.; C.O.S.E.R. and Mechanics' Unions, plus The Open University.

All parties assembled at the N.C.B.'s headquarters at Hobart House to have a meeting with Ian MacGregor, Chairman. The delegation moved on to another meeting with Kenneth Livingstone of the G.L.C., and lunch was at the County Hall. The Party walked across Westminster Bridge to the House of Commons and met John Ryman (M.P. for Blyth) in the Central Lobby. He took the group to a Committee Room for a meeting with the Parliamentary Labour Party. A letter was then taken to 10 Downing Street for the Prime Minister. The final meeting took place with the Secretary of State for Energy, Peter Walker.

The Parliamentary Lobby was well recorded by the media, and promoted the aims of the campaign to a wider, national audience.

Northumberland miners working in the other four nearby pits, were also beginning to add their voice to the Bates Campaign. The closure announcement was the main topic of the three Speakers at the Northumberland N.U.M. rally held in Bedlington in early June.

"If we lose the battle for Bates Colliery", said

Northumberland Miners' President, Denis Murphy.
"we will find the knock-on effect will be that
Ashington and Whittle will go in the near future."

The other speakers, Michael Meecher, Shadow Social Services Secretary, and Paul Foot "Daily Mirror" columnist added their voices with encouraging support to continue campaigning.

THE PUBLIC DEBATE ON THE STUDY

It was agreed at a Bates Action Committee Meeting in mid-June to have a Special Council Meeting to present Dr. Wade's Study on 24th June, 1985. Members of the public were invited, plus people with commercial interests, to attend the presentation.

The main message of the study saying the "cost" of closure would be greater than the "cost" of keeping Bates Colliery open, was not contended and copies of the Study were distributed to Members of Parliament, plus other interested parties and organisations.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

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2. "Evening Chronicle" Fri. 10.5.85.

3. BEYNON, Huw
HUDSON, Ray
SADLER, David
(1991) "A Tale of Two Industries - The Contraction of coal and steel in the North East of England." Open University Press.

4. As Dr. Wade's Research Assistent I accompanied him to most meetings and Conferences. This was the first time in living memory, a woman had attended a N.U.M. meeting!

5. Aims and sponsors of Coalfields Community Campaign noted from Speaker at "North East Coalfields Facing Change" Conference 27.4.85 at Blyth Valley Sports Centre, namely Mr. N. Wedgeworth, Head of Employment Division, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

6. "News Post Leader" dated 23.5.85 (after the N.C.B.'s announcement of closure, but as it is a weekly paper reported the visit of David Hunt before the announcement on 22.5.85.)

CHAPTER EIGHT

ANALYSES OF QUESTIONNAIRES

AND OTHER STUDIES

ANALYSES OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES

The Study was augmented by two questionnaires. These were designed and distributed before the closure of Bates Colliery was announced.

INDUSTRIAL SURVEY

In January 1985 a questionnaire and covering letter (See Fig. 26a) was sent to 120 local firms and 20 mining related companies outside Blyth Valley area. 38 forms were returned.

Of the local firms - the average number of employees per company = Male - 50 and Female - 17. 58% of these firms had expansion plans for the next five years.

The annual turnover taken by N.C.B. orders in these firms was as follows:-

1982	1.9%
1983	3.1%
1984	2.7%

The annual turnover taken by Bates Colliery orders was insignificant. It was envisaged by these firms that 11 jobs would be lost if N.C.B. orders ceased and 1 job lost if Bates orders ceased. They estimated 2 jobs would be lost by their suppliers if Bates closed.

It was interesting to note that only 3 companies using several methods of heating included coal.

40%	use	Gas
10%	use	Electricity
16%	use	Oil
34%	use several methods.	

Industrial Estates were not encouraged to use coal, and a useful local outlet for coal had been lost.

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THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Regional Director
M Susan Hurley BSc PhD

Our Ref: RO9/ EW/MAM/EI

January 1985.

Dear

COAL MINING AND EMPLOYMENT - A STUDY OF BLYTH VALLEY

Blyth Valley Borough Council have asked the Open University to carry out an analysis of the range of impacts the closure or decline of the local mining industry would have on the District, over the next five years.

The Study will seek to identify the impacts of employment decline, including its direct and indirect effects on unemployment, income, local government finance and services. It is also intended to quantify the costs to individuals, families, communities and, more generally, social life in Blyth Valley District.

To carry out the study, it is necessary to consult with a wide variety of people and organisations living in Blyth Valley or with interests in the District as we wish to obtain a range of views on the possible impacts of any further mining job losses.

Your views on this matter, as a local businessman, would be much appreciated. In particular it would assist our project if you could supply the information requested on the attached sheet. (Even if you have no business with the NCB we are interested in hearing from you.) The information you supply will not be revealed to others under any circumstances. If you prefer you could telephone Dr Wade on the above number.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Ed Wade

Dr E Wade
(Project Director and Staff Tutor in Social Science)

Mrs M A Hutchinson (Research Assistant).

Fig. 26 a

COAL-MINING AND EMPLOYMENT - A STUDY OF BLYTH VALLEY

1. How many employees does your company have in Blyth Valley District ?

   Male .....

   Female .....

2. Have you any expansion plans in the next 5 years ? .....

   Brief details .....

3. (a) What % of your annual turnover in 1982/3/4 was taken by NCB orders ?

   1982 .....

   1983 .....

   1984 .....

   (b) What % of your annual turnover in 1982/3/4 was taken by Bates Colliery orders ?

   1982 .....

   1983 .....

   1984 .....

4. How many jobs would your company lose if NCB or Bates Colliery orders ceased ?

   NCB .....

   Bates .....

5. How many jobs do you imagine would be lost by your own suppliers if Bates Colliery closed or if there was a significant run-down in NCB employment in the area ?

6. What form of heating do you use ?

   (a) Gas

   (b) Electricity

   (c) Coal

   (d) Coke

   (e) Other

7. Any other comments .....

   (Please use reverse side of this questionnaire for your comments).

It was concluded from the survey that local firms were fairly optimistic about surviving and expanding without Bates Pit, but the "comments" section of the survey presented a different story:

e.g. "Bates closure would affect work received from Central Heating Engineers."

"Supplies shipping at Blyth Wharf is affected by lack of coal being loaded."

"Strike has caused manpower losses."

"Sales down 25% because of the Strike."

"N.C.B. orders taken indirectly through mining equipment manufacturers."

"Use N.C.B. contractors for business, so indirect effects."

"Some females would leave, as their earnings would erode unemployment benefit."

Individual enquiries were sent to:

Blyth Harbour Commission
British Rail
North Eastern Electricity Board
Manpower Services
North Eastern Development Council
Blyth Power Station (CEGB)
Planning Dept. County Hall, Morpeth
John Ryman, M.P.(Blyth)
Jack Thompson, M.P.(Wansbeck)
Alcan Smelter Plant, Lynemouth
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1. Blyth Harbour Commission attempted to diversify prior to the Strike; however, 650,000 tonnes of coal revenue would be lost due to closure.

2. Housing 5.7% of the housing stock was rented by miners (580). During the Strike 475 council tenants, 130 private tenants and 450 owner-occupiers who were miners claimed housing benefit. 1.5 members of staff were fully employed processing housing benefit claims. More overtime was worked by staff

and more computer time was necessary. An increase in rent arrears of approximately £15,000 was attributed directly to the dispute. 4 cases of homelessness were dealt with by the Dept., as a direct result of building society foreclosing.

When the Strike started and the miners claimed supplementary benefit, they became entitled to certificated housing benefit, but if there was an adult offspring living in the household, a non-dependant deduction of £9.15p per person had to be paid. On occasions, rather than pay increased board, the children left their parents' home.

The following implications of pit closure were drawn from the above facts:-

(a) Housing Benefits - the number of potential housing benefit cases would be 1,410. This figure takes into account council tenants, private tenants and owner-occupiers. The first year might be cushioned by miners taking redundancy and being entitled to unemployment benefit, or being transferred. However, after this initial year and unemployment benefit stopped, the impact would increase.

(b) Management - in the long-term there would be a dramatic rise in rent arrear levels. Increased administration and possible Possession Proceedings would mean staffing cost rises. The impact in the private sector would be more dramatic where building societies and banks would quickly foreclose on

mortgages where arrears accrued, and this would have a serious impact on the Homelessness Section of the Housing Dept.

BATES COLLIERY EMPLOYEES QUESTIONNAIRE

In March, 1985, a three-page questionnaire and accompanying letter (See Fig. 26b) was sent to 300 randomly selected employees, this was followed up by face to face interviews. 68 forms were returned. When designing the questionnaire the concept of "community" was born in mind and examined to a degree in the "comments" section and interviews.

OCCUPATIONAL COMMUNITIES

The concept of community can be regarded in a nostalgic way, as "the good life", "the way things used to be" - everybody's ideal. Bell & Newby[2] say, that if community is to be a legitimate object of sociological enquiry, problems of definition must be resolved and there must be a departure from Tonnies' "Gemeinschaft" conception of community which sees man's natural habitat as some sort of rural utopia.[3] One of the original community theorists, Ferdinand Tonnies made a distinction between industrial and pre-industrial communities. These he called "Gemeinschaft" (translated as community) and "Gesellschaft" (translated as society or association). Gemeinschaft he saw as typifying pre-industrial society. Rural communities were where enduring, intimate relationships abounded amongst kin and neighbours. There was a sense of belonging within a self-contained setting. In such a setting a person's status was ascribed i.e. by who s/he is, not what s/he has done. However, Gesellschaft was the complete antithesis of this, and typical of modern industrial society. In modern industrial society there was little personal

interaction and that only of a shallow, egotistical kind. However, this picture is too crude and inaccurate.

Some theorists have suggested that within industrial societies there are "occupational communities" - communities based on work. The concept originated with S.M. Lipset[4] and was later developed by R. Blauner.[5] The key element in this idea is that workers in certain occupations mix socially outside the workplace with mates rather than with others. The social community of members of these occupational groups may not necessarily be a physical neighbourhood, but members do spend much of their leisuretime together. Membership of their occupation is so important and central to their lives that work relationships also shape their leisuretime. Occupational communities have been described by Lockwood,[6] and others, as typical of male working class traditionalism. Communities of this sort are more traditionally proletarian than others. Lockwood suggests that because of their typically physically isolated position, they are socially insular and not as susceptible to the dominant social ideology. They are able to construct their own sub-cultural moral and political values which counteract the dominant ideology. This, and the typical solidarity of these communities, stems above all from the sociability of males in work and non-work situations.

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THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Our Ref: RO9/EW/EI

Dear Sir

COAL MINING AND EMPLOYMENT : A STUDY OF BLYTH VALLEY

Blyth Valley Council has asked the Open University to carry out an analysis of the range of impacts of the closure or decline of the local mining industry in the district over the next five years.

The study will seek to identify the impacts of employment decline including its direct and indirect effects on unemployment, income, local government finance and services. It is also intended to quantify the costs of individuals, families, communities and, more generally, social life in Blyth Valley District.

To carry out the study it is necessary to consult with a wide variety of people and organisations living in Blyth Valley or with interests in the district as we wish to obtain a range of views on the possible impacts of any further mining job losses.

It would be much appreciated if you could assist us by completing the enclosed questionnaire and returning it to me in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope. The contents of the questionnaire will be treated in the strictest confidence and as you will note your name, or address, is not included on the questionnaire consequently your views and any information on the form will be entirely anonymous.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Eric Wade.

Dr Eric Wade
Project Director and
Staff Tutor in Social Science.

March 1985

Fig. 26b

QUESTIONNAIRE

Coal Mining and Employment - A Study of Blyth Valley

Bates Colliery Employees

Date of Birth..... (Age.....)

Number of Children..... (Ages.....)

Number of Dependants..... (Ages.....)

HISTORY

1. (a) How long have you worked in the Coal Industry .....

   (b) How long have you worked at Bates .....

   (c) Where did you work before ?

Name of Firm or Pit	Town	Dates
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....

2. (a) What is your present job at Bates ? .....

TRAVEL TO WORK PATTERNS

3. (a) How far do you live from Bates ? .....

   (b) How do you travel to work ? .....

   (i) if you use a bus, by which Bus Company is it run ? .....

   (c) Do you have a car ? .....

   (i) if 'No', did you have one before the Strike .....

MOBILITY

4. If the Pit closed what would you do ?

   (a) Move to any other area in Britain with mining vacancies .....

   (b) Take (i) redundancy .....

   (ii) early retirement ? .....

   (c) Become unemployed ? .....

   (d) Transfer to a nearby pit if possible ? .....

   (e) Try for other work nearby in other industry ? .....

   If 'Yes' to above (i) what is your preference .....

   (ii) are you trained for other work?.....

   (f) Other ? (eg Start own business, emigrate etc.) .....

FUTURE OF PIT

5. What are your thoughts on the future of the Pit ? (eg Geological, Economic, Political, etc.)

.....

.....

.....

.....

SHOPPING PATTERNS

6. Where do you shop for the bulk of your groceries and durables ?

(a) Place (name and address) .....

(b) Frequency .....

(c) Mode of Transport .....

SPENDING PATTERNS

7. (a) Do you take a holiday in a normal working year ? .....

If 'Yes' quote examples .....

.....

.....

(b) In a normal working year would you buy any luxury products ? (eg microwave, caravan,etc) .....

If 'Yes' quote examples .....

(c) How would you economise if your income was reduced ?

(eg holidays, cigarettes, etc) .....

.....

.....

.....

HOUSING

8. (a) Do you own your house ? ..... If 'Yes' Cost of mortgate per month £.....

Cost of rates per month £.....

(b) If 'No', whom do you rent from ?

(i) Council..... Which District .....

(ii) N.C.B. .....

(iii) Private Landlord .....

Cost of rent per month £.....

(c) Where did you live before this house ? .....

(d) Why did you move ? .....

(e) Would you have to move if the Pit closed ? .....

HEATING

9. (a) Do you use your 'free coal allocation' ? .....

(b) What is your main heating source ? .....

COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

10. (a) Do you have relatives nearby ? .....

If 'Yes", how many do you see in a week ? .....

(b) Are most of your friends miners ? .....

If 'Yes' do they mostly live near you ? .....

(c) Do you belong to a Club or Association near you ? .....

If 'Yes', which ? Name and address .....

.....

.....

(d) Would your social activities change if the Pit closed ?.....

If 'Yes', how ? .....

.....

ANY FURTHER COMMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE ?

11.

These replies will be treated in the strictest confidence.

QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

The following detailed data was collected from these replies and interviews (using the same format as the questionnaire form).

The average age in the sample was 40 years. The youngest person to reply was aged 21 years.

21 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55+
7%	23%	39%	22%	9%

History

The average number of years that employees had worked in the coal industry = 22 years.

The average number of years that employees had worked at Bates = 18.5 years.

Travel to Work Patterns

The average distance that employees lived from Bates = 1.3 miles. Therefore, over 50% walked to work. 34% used their cars and 9% - bikes. Only one person used the bus, so the effect on bus revenue would be negligible. However, 14% used the bus to shop and might reduce their number of visits to some extent. The increase in bus revenue in transferred miners to Ellington, however, would more than compensate any slight reduction of shopping trips.

Over 50% of employees owned a car. 9 had to sell because of the Strike.

Mobility

Six alternatives for action if the Pit closed were given, but most employees replied with multiple choices.

(a) Move to any other area in Britain with mining vacancies 11% Yes

(b) Take (i) redundancy .. .. 48% Yes

(ii) early retirement .. .. 3% Yes

(c) Become unemployed .. .. 3% Yes

(d) Transfer to nearby pit if possible .. .. 7% Likely

(e) Try for other work nearby in other industry .. .. 42% Yes

(f) Other e.g. Start own business: 7 - Yes.
Emigrate: 5 - Yes.

Future

We asked employees for their thoughts on the future of the Pit. The majority gave the opinion that the closure had been manufactured by the N.C.B. and Government. The wrong equipment had been used and geological problems not seriously tackled. Planning and management were not complimented. The general opinion was bleak and gloomy, showing a very low morale. However, it was repeatedly stated that the Pit could be made to work economically given the right equipment, management and time.

Shopping Patterns

70% of employees shopped at Presto in Blyth

30% of employees shopped at the Co-op in Blyth

for their groceries and durables.

Spending Patterns

71% of employees took a holiday in a normal working year. 23% did not and 5% did sometimes. 73 employees go on holiday in the UK and 40 abroad. As 54% would economise on holidays on a reduced income, the tourist industry in the UK and travel agents and holidays companies (especially those running holidays to Spain) would suffer.

In a normal working year 40% would buy luxury products such as

microwave ovens; videos; caravans; etc. On a reduced income economies would be made on holidays - 54. Social evenings out - 28; cigarettes - 23; groceries - 25; sell car - 15.

Heating - 88% used their free coal allowance.

Housing

65% of employees owned their own houses and paid £82 per month average mortgage. £25 per month average Rates. 21 employees rented from the Council and paid £99 per month average rent. 8 rented from the N.C.B. and paid £24 a month average rent and 1 rented from a private landlord at £40 per month. 4 lived with parents.

In reply to the question "Where did you live before this house?" only 3 people came from more than a 5 mile radius of Blyth! 1 North Shields. 1 Chesterfield and 1 Nottingham. Everyone else had moved in and around the Blyth area, for reasons such as a larger house, getting married, old house demolished, better property etc.

If the Pit closed 26% would have to move. 60% would not and 14% did not know.

This consolidates the notion of a "close community" structure, which usually means older people are not prepared to move for work.

Community Structure

96% had relatives living nearby, and saw an average of 6 in a week. 79% had friends who were mostly miners, and 90% of those friends lived nearby. 80% belonged to a Club or Association nearby. If the Pit closed 61% would have to change their social activities by economising on

hobbies, evenings out etc., but on the other hand a few would enjoy leisure for gardening, wine-making etc.

Question 11 on the 3rd page of the questionnaire asked for "any further comments you would like to make". 8 closely-typed pages of these comments were compiled. Some gave technical advice on how to run the Pit more profitably; some gave economic and political advice; some were funny; some were sad. These comments highlighted the problems that were worrying the men before the closure announcement. Following the subject pattern of the questionnaire an analysis of these comments is as follows:-

History

"When I started work in 1951, Bates only had 5 years to go and it's been going to close ever since, so if it closes, it closes."

This quotation demonstrates the resignation and apathy created by the long battle with the N.C.B., and the decline of the coalfield in this area. Another example is also depressing -

"My impression of men at work, including myself, is that most men couldn't care less if the Pit stays open or not. The way things are now with a lot of men not speaking to each other and all the rubbish told us by the Union and Management. Most men are sick to death of the lies from both sides. I am prepared to do any work, anywhere for a decent wage, but now there is no future in mining."

Travel to Work Patterns

In this section we posed a question on car ownership. One man who replied is an "amputee" and if the Pit closed, he would not wish to transfer, and therefore on a reduced income he would have to sell his car. This would seriously affect his mobility, and life-style. However, it is interesting to note that he does not dwell on his own situation, but expresses his depression in a more global sense -

"There are 200 years future at least in the remaining coal fields of Britain, yet the Government wants to close this valuable asset of ours to make way for Nuclear Power Stations and many dangers from them and their waste for hundreds of years to come. Also there is the question of unemployment and the dangers and hardship this will bring. Having no money breeds crime and violence as well as poverty. This country of mine, for which I would gladly have given my life, is no more. It has disappeared like the hopes of young and elderly people."

Mobility - Under this section the men were asked what would be their course of action if the Pit closed. Transfer, redundancy, unemployment etc. Although at the time, no debate had ensued on the 'transfer' situation, i.e. men urged not to transfer and to stay solid at Bates - one reply summed up this situation with astute forsight.

"At my age - 47, what is the point of transferring to a nearby colliery? or any other colliery, if in 2 or 3 years they close it. It is just like being lifted to a great height and dropped

again. And in this area the N.C.B. are experts. As for trying for other work in the area, I think that must be one big joke. Anyway, I haven't got a bike!". Another example is shown in this conversational response.

"When I first came to Bates, I said to myself 'Well, at least I now have a job with a lot of security.' How wrong I was. I have never seen men selling their jobs and souls to get a few thousand pounds. I only hope when their blood money runs out and they cannot get any dole money or help, they will realise what myself and others were on Strike for nearly a year for. What happens to us when a place like Bates closes? Rates up, Rents up, Jobs none, Vandalism up, Standard of Living down."

If anyone requested redundancy, one man pointed out the terse way in which the N.C.B. acknowledged that request. After a possible 30 years of toil and hardship the final letter reads as follows:-

> "I regret that because of Reorganisation giving rise to redundancy, I am obliged to give you 12 weeks' notice to terminate your employment with the Board on .....
> On behalf of the Board, may I take this opportunity of thanking you for your good service in the Industry."

The confusion of choice in this matter, of which way to jump, run for cover, or risk staying put can be summed up in the following reply:-

"Me and my wife are very worried about what sort of lives we are to have in the future. Everything is so uncertain you

don't know which way to look at things anymore. 1) I can put my redundancy in, pay my house off with it, and be left with nothing. 2) Stay where I am for now and see what happens and might be left with nothing at all. 3) The N.C.B. might try transferring me to another Pit right out of our own community and we would hate that. 4) I just don't know what will happen, but it won't be good news whatever it is, unless they keep the Pit open for a long time."

The men did not hold out a healthy prognosis for finding alternative employment:-

"If Bates Colliery closed in the near future, the effect would be terrible for Blyth and surrounding area. The prospect of young people (even myself at 36) may never find permanent employment again."

"During the Strike my sister-in-law was laid off; my father-in-law was made redundant after working 45 years on the tugs on the River Blyth. This was just one family on Strike - what would happen if the Pit closed?"

Future of the Pit

The questionnaire asked for political, technical or economic suggestions and many useful points were noted and followed up by Dr. Wade to use in the Study to promote an alternative plan for an economic and viable Pit.

As an example of political advice, one man suggested:-

"1. If the Pits are Nationalised then why not ballot the British people to see their views on the closure of their pits?

2. Further both Labour Party and T.U.C. support in order to press the need upon all Unions to use their weight against proposed pit closures, and 'no' to any form of privatisation.

3. Look into what the Government is doing buying African pits instead of subsidising British pits, more to equal the French and German subsidies."

The Global threat is also highlighted - "It is easier and cheaper to mine coal abroad. For instance, China is becoming the biggest coal producer in the World. We also know that the City of London have been buying coal fields in South America; Africa; India and Australia."

Shopping and Spending Patterns

One surface worker commented that he could not possibly economise any more. He and his wife "don't smoke; drink; have a car, or take holidays, because we can't afford to. There is not much money difference between what I earn and a man on the dole. I cannot claim "Family Income Support" as I am 65p over the top of the limit. Really it does not give you an incentive to work for a living."

Housing

There was concern in the private and rental sector of Blyth, as shown by the following 2 quotes:-

"If Bates Pit were to close it would be difficult for me to move to another area, as I have three children living with me who are working. If I moved and they stayed, where would they live? If they moved with me, where would they find work? Also I think finding a buyer for my house would be very difficult."

"N.C.B. property would probably be in jeopardy. Once the mine closes. The N.C.B. have in the past put their property up for sale. A property developer would buy them, do them up and sell them at a vast profit. (e.g. New Hartley). The elderly people in particular, are very worried and unsettled about this possibility."

If the N.C.B. sold off their housing stock, the plans of one family who had endured gross upheaval in the Strike, would have to change - "We sold our house due to the Strike and mounting debt. As it was the only one available to us we lost our heating allowance. We hope to get a colliery house when they come available (to get our heating allowance back)."

Heating

As 87% of the men surveyed used their "free coal allocation" it was not surprising that Blyth Valley Council were criticised for their policy of a "Smoke Free Area".

"This makes people change to other types of heating, such as Gas/Electricity/Oil, and once more another nail is in the coffin for coal."

Community Structure

A high proportion of comments remarked that the closure would mean a community disaster, and stressed Blyth's close-knit structure.

"Having worked at Bates for 20 years, I think it would be tragic if it closed. It is a close knit community and not everybody wants to move away from the area. I have lived here all my life and I hope to continue for a long time."

These comments give some sense of tribulation, worry, confusion and depth of feeling that is impossible to convey in an economic or technical study. Finally, in this section, there was one reply that encapsulated all aspects of the study in one paragraph -

"I think the Pit is closing because of Tory Policy. I think that our Pit is particularly threatened because of mismanagement and bad planning. When the Pit closes I very much doubt if I will be able to find employment locally. I imagine I will be in and out of mediocre jobs with the dole inbetween. After 15 years of working unsocial hours in an oppressive environment producing the wealth of this country, I feel very bitter at what is now happening to our Pit and industry. I will not move from the area as I value my family and relatives' visits and the effect it has on my young family. I think moving would deprive my children of visits from their Gran and Grandads, and to me this is unthinkable."[7]

Martin Bulmer describes an "ideal type" of occupational community.[8] He stresses that this is not an actual description of reality, but

merely a theoretical construct against which a comparison may be made via empirical investigation. He suggests that mining communities may have the following characteristics:-

(1) Physical isolation - due to geographical location of coal mining, communities are widely dispersed and this may lead to reduction in contact with the outside world.

(2) Economic predominance of mining - settlements which came about because of coal mining and as a result are single industry communities.

(3) Nature of work - work is very dangerous and physically taxing, with a high accident rate and a high risk of disability and illness through occupation. Miners work in groups, not as individuals, and depend on each other for their safety.

(4) Social consequences of occupational homogeneity and isolation - the social structure of mining communities consists mostly of members of the working class. This results in little social interaction with outside groups. The skills are related only to the mining industry, which therefore hampers any social or geographical mobility.

(5) Leisure activities - workmates are also companions during leisure pursuits. Work topics tend to overlap into these periods of leisure, leading to the creation of an intense occupational community outside of work.

(6) The family - there is a distinct segregation of male and female roles. Male activity is centred outside of the home with workmates in work and non-work pursuits. The

main social contact for them is with other women, either kin, or neighbours.

(7) Economic and political conflict - in a capitalist society both miner and mineowners are of necessity in conflict. Each form associations to protect their own interests. The employer wishes to maintain the status quo, whereas the miner wishes to limit the mineowners' ability to exploit human labour. However, in the capitalist mining community the miner will ultimately be subjugated in the mineowners' interest, because of his domination over all aspects of economic life of the community.

(8) The whole - communal social relationships typify traditional mining communities, together with the social ties of work, leisure, family and neighbourhood, all come together to show a close knit, locally based group. These localities are typically inward looking, resulting from their occupational homogeneity, social and geographical isolation from other areas of society.

These features form (according to Bulmer) an "ideal type" of mining community, and they seem to be very close to a description of 'Ashton' in Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter's study "Coal is our Life". Dennis et al looked at patterns of work, leisure and the family within 'Ashton' a Yorkshire mining village. They show a community dominated by coal mining, and a society which is patriarchal, built by men for men. There were very few opportunities for women, particularly in the area of employment, the shift working of their husbands limiting their availability for work. The ideology

of 'women's place is in the home' is very prevalent. They show the family structure and roles of husband and wife to be strongly segregated. However, this important and influential research was carried out in the early 1950's and one must take this into account when looking at mining communities 40 years later. The womens' 'liberation' movement and the noticeable change to the new "political" woman described earlier, during the Strike, have all made subtle changes to attitude, but not always to lifestyle.

The other interesting question to ask now, is what happens to an occupational community when the occupations disappear, especially when the disappearance of these jobs are not acceptable to the men of these communities? In the typical mining community individual competitiveness in the search of financial well being is not highly regarded. Personal financial behaviour is not thought of in terms of economic profit and loss. Most people's financial ideas go little beyond the division between "managing" and "not managing". Thus, it could be argued that the moral ideas of mining communities and the economic arguments of the Government and the N.C.B. inhabit different universes.

STUDY CONCLUSIONS

Finally, the conclusions of Dr. Wade's Study were incorporated into the Borough of Blyth Valley's document "A Case for Bates Colliery". The Summary read as follows;

"1. The Council has pursued a vigorous programme of job creation which has recently shown clear signs of success. The closure of Bates Colliery would set back its achievements by at least 10 years.

2. The Borough has suffered persistent structural unemployment which has worsened during the current recession. The situation is particularly severe in the town of Blyth which has an unemployment rate of 21%.

3. Coal mining is the Borough's traditional industry and despite the decline in the industry as a whole, Bates Colliery remains the largest single employer in the town of Blyth.

4. The newer manufacturing industries, which were intended to replace jobs lost in coal mining, have been adversely affected by the recession. Several major redundances and closures have occurred during 1984/5 with the loss of over 570 jobs.

5. It has been estimated that the closure of Bates Colliery would have the short term effect of raising male unemployment in Blyth from the current 20.5% to between 23% and 26%. In the longer term, unemployment levels would increase to between 24% and 27% as a result of job loss in associated industries and local services.

6. The loss of 1500 job opportunities would have a particularly severe effect on young people, for whom there are few alternative

job opportunities.

7. There is an established correlation between unemployment and social stress. Blyth already has high stress indices and the additional unemployment resulting from the colliery's closure would precipitate an irreparable collapse of community life.

8. The Council's ability to replace the 600 jobs already lost at Bates have been hampered by legislative changes imposed by Central Government. This renders impossible the task of job replacement in the aftermath of a complete closure. Measures proposed by the Coal Board through N.C.B. Enterprises Ltd., are completely inadequate.

9. There is a strong case for retaining Bates Colliery which is based on the plan proposed by the Unions and Management. Coal is important to the local economy, particularly to the Port of Blyth. This plan would increase output, reduce losses and result in the production of better quality coal.

10. The social costs of closure greatly outweigh the cost of maintaining production.

11. On the basis of the foregoing evidence the Council concludes that the continued existence of Bates Colliery is essential to the Borough, especially the town of Blyth, and that a closure could bring desolation to the local community.

OTHER STUDIES

Now the impetus of the campaign moved towards gathering data for the Independent Colliery Review Body hearing. As other Pits in the country were going through the same procedure it was thought wise to pool all the University studies in the country that were relevant to Pit Closures. A meeting was set up at St.James House, (N.U.M. offices) Sheffield. Representatives from Durham, Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Leeds, St. Andrews, O.U., Bradford, and Sheffield Universities and Chesterfield W.E.A.

[9]
The Papers that were tabled were mostly in draft form and developed into the following studies:

1. GLYN, Andrew "Data for Colliery Reviews", (24.6.85)
" (9.6.85) "The Case for St. John's" (South Wales). Oxford University.

These studies examined the Reserves, Markets, Financial and Economic Appraisal plus the Social Consequences with Special reference to St. John's Colliery, near Maesteg in Mid-Glamorgan. The paper argued that a subsidy of £1 million to keep the pit open, was far less than the unemployment costs of closing it.

2. WADE, Eric (1985) "Coal Mining and Employment - A Study of Blyth Valley". The Open University.

3. FOTHERGILL, Stephen "Nuclear Power and
(August 1985) the Coal Industry" Cambridge University.

This paper compared the cost of the nuclear and coal

industries. The economics of both industries are discussed in depth and the final sentence in the "Conclusion" reads: "To safeguard the long-term future of the coal industry, and to protect its markets, there should be an immediate moratorium on the ordering of new nuclear power stations: this is entirely justified on economic and strategic grounds, and need not imply any judgement about the technical merits or safety aspects of nuclear power."

4. O'DONNELL, Kathy (Summer 1985) "Brought to Account: The N.C.B. and the Case for Coal" Leeds University.

This study demonstrated with examples that "there is no simple relationship between colliery performance, as reflected in financial statements, and geological conditions. Indeed, it has been shown that variations in performance are to a large extent of the N.C.B.'s own making; that is to say, they are the product of particular control mechanisms operated from the centre. The Board's policies in respect of pricing, output and investment impinge directly on the organisation, management and performance of individual collieries." She concludes: "political struggle should be concentrated on ensuring that this industry is organised to serve the needs of society instead of being subordinated to the varying political objectives of the State."

5. HUDSON, Ray
PECK, Francis
SADLER, David (December 1984) "Undermining Easington: Who will pay the price of Pit Closures?"

This research investigated the social effects of possible

further coal mining job losses in Easington, Co. Durham. The final comment from a local girl reads: "I think it will be very dead. It is not Blackhall, Horden and Easington without the pits."

N.B. A follow-up study was carried out by Ray HUDSON, in October 1991, entitled "Undermining Easington Even More - A Preliminary Analysis of the Impacts of Further Colliery Closures and Coal Mining Employment Decline in Easington District", following the closure of Dawdon Colliery in 1991 and the "soon-to-be" closed Murton Colliery. This report examines the labour market changes; the economic costs and social consequences of past and future job losses; the creation of alternative employment and the social policy implications of continuing unemployment.

The fight to gain some reprieve from the announcement of closure had begun. Hopes were high and the morale of the men began to become more positive and optimistic as they looked foward to a fair hearing in the High Court.

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8. DENNIS, N. HENRIQUES, F. SLAUGHTER, C. "Coal is our Life" (1956) - An Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community. Tavistock Publications.

9. Studies all listed in detail in final pages of Ch.8.

CHAPTER NINE

NEW MODIFIED COLLIERY REVIEW PROCEDURE

INDEPENDENT REVIEW BODY

PREPARATIONS

As the academics amassed their information the Unions and Borough of Blyth Valley also compiled their Reports to present at the Independent Review Body set for 21-23 January 1986.

As explained in Chapter 7, the battle to persuade the N.C.B. to implement the Procedure had been hard fought, and a Court Injunction taken out to ensure the established colliery review procedure was implemented. At the High Court on 6th June, 1985 lawyers for the N.C.B. gave an assurance that they would follow the colliery review procedure and do nothing to predetermine the outcome of the procedure. They were then committed to maintain the fabric of the pit and stabilise the workforce at 900 men.

The coal industry's independent but voluntary review board was one of the most encouraging procedures to emerge from the prolonged Strike, and the nearest thing to a victory for the Unions. The N.C.B.'s remit was to cast an eye over the pits due to close on what they defined as on "economic" grounds. It was charged with not calculating the devastating social costs of closure in areas of already high unemployment. The Review Body could recommend a reprieve on the grounds it would cost the nation more - in unemployment and social security benefits, in relocation expenses and in general knock-on regional decay. On the other hand the Review Body might judge

that closure would be cheaper for the Nation and the N.C.B. However, it could still advise against taking a Beeching-style axe to a particularly vulnerable community.

By mutual agreement, the Review Body's findings were not legally binding. The Unions, as much as the N.C.B. wanted freedom to reject unfavourable judgements. It took eight months to negotiate the terms of reference and the composition of the Review Body.

The N.C.B. and the three mining unions agreed to appoint six independent arbitrators, three to be nominated by each side. Only one of the Panel would Chair each hearing. As explained the findings of the panel would only be advisory - the final right of decision was to remain with the N.C.B., although it would give full weight to the panel's findings.

Before the three hearings were heard, i.e. Horden (Co. Durham) Bates (Northumberland) and St. John's (South wales), the Management of each pit tried every means possible to get the workforce effectively to close the pit by transferring or taking redundancy. The tactics of the N.C.B. during this period are central to an understanding of its attitude to the Review Body. It also raised serious and disturbing questions about the aims of senior management and its ability to communicate with the workforce in the industry.

The pressure on Bates intensified. The N.C.B. set a deadline of midnight on 9 October, 1985 to apply for redundancy. This, they said, was the last possible date on which they could be issued with 90-day redundancy notices enabling them to leave

by the end of 1985. This precipitated a "scramble" to leave.

2

The second pressure came when the R52 face output had been increasing, and as it did so the production targets increased from 15 to 23 metres of advance per shift. During the previous 11 weeks the face had advanced an average 16.1 metres per shift. As a result of the new target, the men stood to lose between £12 and £15 a shift in bonus payments. Ronnie Campbell, N.U.M. Lodge Chairman, asked "why have the Board suddenly decided to raise production targets? It's a deplorable move - they don't want Bates to stay open."

THE HEARING

The N.U.M. had presented a large folder to the Q.C. - Mr. Peter Bowsher and the Arbitrators to consider before the Hearing. This Report consisted of all the accumulated evidence of Dr. Wade's Report; the Borough of Blyth Valley's "Case for Bates Colliery"; and a Mining Engineering Submission by N.U.M.'s Chief Mining Engineer, Mr. A. Bulmer. This Report made many references to the "Secret Document" revealing N.C.B. Plans for the North East, plus the "Coal Board's 1974 Plan for Coal", which had made such optimistic projections for Bates Colliery.

The final paragraph of the N.U.M. Submission read:

> "This Appeal is the second brought under the New Modified Colliery Review Procedure. It is the hope of the National Union of Mineworkers that the evidence presented will be sufficient to persuade a judgement in favour of the Union's Appeal. A colliery which has served this nation and the

North East coalfield well for over 80 years; a workforce which is totally dedicated and all the evidence outlined in this case, hopefully will result in a decision to keep this pit open."

When the 21st January, 1986 arrived the Hearing took place in Room 16 of Hobart House (N.C.B. Headquarters) in London. The names of the assembled company at the Hearing are too numerous to list, but in attendance were 6 representatives from N.U.M. National Office; 6 from Northumberland Area N.U.M.; 3 from N.U.M. COSA; 4 from Northumberland Mechanics; 2 Witnesses, namely Dr. Wade and Cllr. I. Gordon (Leader of Borough of Blyth Valley Council); 3 more from Blyth Valley; 12 from the National Association of Colliery Overmen Deputies and Shotfirers, including Accountants from Wilson Johnson; 11 from the National Coal Board and 4 Area Officials - N.C.B.; and 2 from Secretariat.

Two days of questioning and answering ensued on coal quality; geological problems; production figures; markets for steam coal; access to coal measures North of the West Sleekburn Dyke System; and finally the "social consequences" of the closure of Bates Colliery.

Mr. A. Bulmer, Senior N.U.M. Mining Engineer, presented evidence that pointed out possibilities in the Burn 1984 plan, which had been discredited due to losses in the Strike. He believed it was possible to reduce losses by concentrating on one seam where there was coal of a higher quality, and this together with a reduced workforce would

lead to higher proceeds. He suggested that two years was required to make this plan work.

It soon became very clear that the N.C.B. contingent took exception to the format of the Review and they considered it should be conducted within narrow economic and geological parameters. They thought it should not be extended to consider indirect economic costs and certainly not the social consequences of mine closures. They would not discuss the wider implications of coal mining redundancies upon the coal districts, and gave the "expert" witnesses and Accountants a hard time, trying to discredit their function at the Review.

THE VERDICT

On 4th February, 1986, Mr. Bowsher QC, who had been Chairman, felt, social consequences, were within the remit of the Review Body's jurisdiction. As he reasoned:

> "The social consequences of closure of a pit were matters which NACODS wished to be taken into account in the New Modified Colliery Review Procedure. The N.C.B. never agreed to this. But so far as I can ascertain from the evidence before me, it was never explicitly stated that social consequences would be disregarded."

He regarded the substantial reserves of coal at Bates Colliery an important factor and did not think they should be left sterile if at all possible:

> "The marketing problems for Bates coal are severe. I do

not believe that they are insuperable. If the N.C.B. and the Unions would only demonstrate to the voting public the measure of common interest that was demonstrated to me during this hearing, I believe that a change in government policies could be effected, particularly as we approach a General Election. The influence of the environmental lobby in all parties is not to be underestimated and that lobby will not lightly accept that substantial national resources should be discarded."

He continued:

"The workforce at Bates have been led to believe that the pit has a future and they have made financial sacrifices on that basis. Fairness requires that the workforce should be given the chance to prove that the pit has a viable economic future. There is at least a possibility that Bates has a viable economic future."

Finally, he recommended:

"That Bates Colliery be operated for two years from now on the lines of the "Bulmer Plan" and if results then show that the "Bulmer Plan" is to a reasonable degree on course and there is then a reasonable expectation that a contribution will be made to overheads the colliery should remain in operation thereafter."

The celebrations that evening were extensive and expansive! The men were 100% behind the push to prove themselves for

the next two years and the high morale would have boosted the quality, quantity of output and health of the workforce to make sure the "Bulmer Plan" was on course.

THE FINAL BLOW

On 20th February, 1986 just over two weeks later, the National Coal Board decided to close Bates Colliery - despite the advice of the Independant Review Body. The Newcastle upon Tyne "Journal" Newspaper on 21.2.86, reported:

"Production of the 880-man pit, the last in the Blyth Valley area, will cease next week, and salvage work will start immediately. As the political storm over the decision spread last night, miners' leaders reacted with shock and anger. The Independent Review had advocated keeping the pit open for at least two more years."

Comments of disgust, shock, horror, and disbelief came from all the Union Leaders, Coalfield Communities Campaign, and

Dr. Wade who said:

"It is a disaster for all concerned. It is a disaster for labour relations in industry throughout the country."

Dr. Gordon Adam, Northumbria's Euro M.P., said:

"The decision was irresponsible. The Board was quick enough to accept the closure of Horden Colliery when the independent appeal recommended it. They should have been just as quick to accept that Bates should stay open."

Furious Labour M.P.'s tabled a Commons motion condemning the N.C.B.'s decision. "The Journal" said

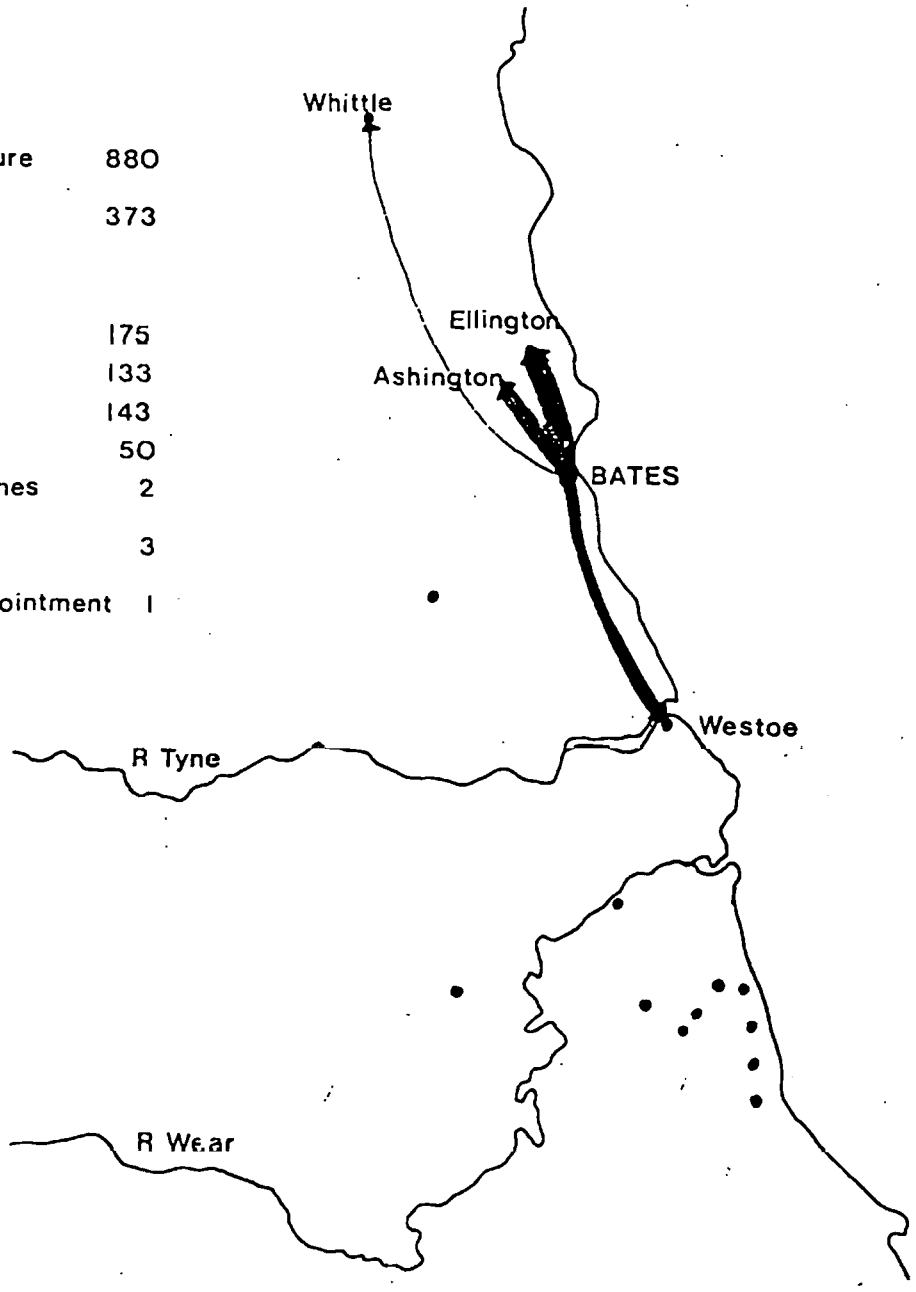
"Blyth Valley Labour M.P., Mr. John Ryman, slammed

down an emergency Commons question which could force Energy Secretary, Mr. Peter Walker to make a full statement to M.P.'s today.
Labour Leader, Mr. Neil Kinnock backed attempts to fight the closure ruling and Shadow Energy Secretary Mr. Stan Orme said the decision was a slap in the face for the workers and the Review Body."

The credibility of the Independent Colliery Review Procedure which had been so hard won, was demolished.
The Trade Unions attempted to retrieve the situation by again obtaining an injunction to prevent closure while talks continued, along with a judicial review of the decision. However, on 28th February, 1985 in the High Court the union was unable to give any undertaking to meet financial losses that the Board might suffer in the interim, and the injunction was removed.
In March the judicial review, first won by the N.U.M., was lost on appeal in the High Court. By this time the workforce had become quite demoralised and many, like Ronnie Campbell (now M.P. for Blyth) refused to transfer, unable to work for an employer that had turned itself into an enemy. (See Fig.27)

THE TRANSFER OF MINERS FROM BATES PIT AT CLOSURE

Manpower at closure	880
Redundancies	373
Transfers:	
Ellington	175
Westoe	133
Ashington	143
Whittle	50
Blyth Staithes	2
Wastage	3
Non Industrial Appointment	1



Source: British Coal

fig.**27**

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2. REDUNDANT MINERS PAYMENT SCHEME was originally introduced to reduce the numbers of older miners, but in fact benefits even those who have not been in the industry for very long. To qualify for the scheme a miner must give three months notice of voluntary redundancy. Whatever his age, he will receive £1,000 for every year of service, plus statutory redundancy of £3,480 e.g. a 49 year old with 33 years service stands to gain £36,480. An older man at say 55 years who is unlikely to find other work gets a smaller lump sum payment of £7,800 and statutory redundancy of £3900, but also receives weekly benefit of £109 until 60 then £81.20 from 60 until he receives state pension at 65, plus a payment of £4,184 at 60. This is beneficial, but in an area like Blyth, where the chances of re-employment are slight, £36,000 amounts to little over three years wages and will merely act as a buffer against unemployment.

   SOURCE; 'GUARDIAN' - K. Harper (18.9.86).

3. See (1) P.81

4. See (1) P.82

CHAPTER TEN

OPENCAST MINING

THE RISE OF OPENCAST MINING IN THE NORTH-EAST

Coal -quarrying, the earliest form of coal production, is still practised today. Where an unworked coal deposit is found immediately beneath the upper soil, it is won by what is known as the "opencast" method. Huge excavating machines dig away the soil, set it on one side, extract the coal, and replace the covering soil as they found it - perhaps 40 years later!

THE 1980's

During the 1984-5 miner's strike many of the private opencast operators continued to produce coal and sell it on the open market. Several fortunes were made as a result. In the North East one such operator, Banks, was picketed by the miners. This company took out an injunction against the Durham N.U.M. and the court ruled that all picketing of Banks' sites should cease. At that point, Tom Callan, the moderate General Secretary of the Durham Area, remarked that: "They are just out to make as much profit as they can, and they'd do anything to make a profit. They're just private capitalists. Ruthless capitalists." This feeling of antagonism rested upon more than the writ issued by Banks against the union. It stretched back to 1947 and the idea that the private interests had been removed from the industry. In 1984 they could be seen as active agents once again; and subsequently these private operators have exerted a powerful pressure upon the government, arguing

for the privatisation of the industry. For full details of the rise in output of opencast coal production, See Pgs.68-70.

In some ways opencast production appeared to be compatible with re-employment plans. In their evidence to an inquiry in 1984, the planning consultants F.J. and J. Davis argued that:

> "The proposed mine would directly create 16 jobs on site. In addition the mine would require drivers for an average of 5/6 20-tonne lorries per day .. In addition to the employment created directly by the mine, other jobs are initially created and local industries supported."

However, these employment gains needed to be offset against potential losses in deep mining. Such losses would not occur in a situation of complementary production, but where a level of competition exists it became clear that increased tonnage in the west of Durham and Northumberland would produce a comparable loss of tonnage in the east. The employment effect for the area as a whole was likely to be severe. It was arguable that if in 1978, the N.C.B and the Local Authorities had produced a plan to scale down opencast output, there would have been very little stockpiling and a significant proportion of deep mining jobs lost would have been saved. The argument became stronger if we considered the additional ancillary jobs created by deep mining in contrast to opencast.

However, this was not to be and opencast mining continued

unabated. Alongside it was the expansion of private opencast sites selling their coal on the open market. In its public statements the N.C.B. insisted that opencast and deep-mined output complement each other. In 1984 there was strong and growing support for an argument which would suggest the opposite. Certainly, it was clear that what was taking place represented an important shift in policy from that recommended by the widely respected Flowers Commission in its report "Coal and the Environment". This report had argued that "as older, more costly and less environmentally acceptable pits are closed, and more efficient and profitable operations take their place, the volume of opencast mining should be allowed to decline". (HMSO, 1981).[2] Since that date, 8 pits closed in Northumberland but there was no commensurate decline in opencast output.

OPENCAST MINING IN NORTHUMBERLAND

Since 1977 it had been the practice of Northumberland County Council to seek agreement with the N.C.B. on a long term programme for opencast coal workings in Northumberland. The proposals are the subject of wide consultation and reviewed at approximately two to three year intervals. The last review was in 1987 and was expanded to cover both deep mining and opencasting and the public and private sectors of the industry. The latest Consultation Document was approved for consultation by the Environment and Economic Development Committee on 10th December, 1991. Unfortunately, despite all these precautions of consultation the Government do not take Northumberland County Council's recommendations into account and frequently over-rule decisions of refusal due to environmental arguments for development of opencast sites in "beautiful" areas.

The N.C.B. declared a new stategy for the coal industry in October 1985.[3] This indicated the need for the Board to respond flexibly to market requirements and to operate profitably without Government subsidy. The Coal Industry Act 1990 cleared British Coal's (as the N.C.B. was now called) deep mining debts, but there were no further subsidies for the industry.

MINERAL PLANNING GUIDANCE

The Department of the Environment has produced guidelines providing advice to mineral planning authorities on the exercise of planning control over opencast coal mining.[4] The Guidance Notes states,

> "Opencast coal is an important national resource. The Government recognises this and also recognises that proposals for opencast operations need to be considered with full regard to their potential environmental effects and the scope for mitigating those effects, including the satisfactory restoration of the site. It is therefore essential to strike the right balance between the nation's interest in exploiting this mineral resource and that of protecting the environment."

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The Government sees its role in relation to energy supply as helping to create the conditions necessary for the free operation of the market. There is to be no target for opencast coal output, but

> "it is for the industry to make commercial decisions about the sites they wish to work and the level of output for which they wish to aim in any period in the light of market conditions."

The Guidance Notes state that mineral planning authorities will need to consider environmental, nature conservation, agricultural, landscape, traffic and other effects of proposals. The environmental effects include the visual intrusion of a site, and effects of dust, noise and vibration from working, blasting and traffic movements. The Notes state

> "Where programmes have been agreed the Secretary of State will have regard to them in approving development plans and deciding opencast appeals."

However, as already stated the appeals seldom stand up to the Secretary of State's scrutiny and are often over-ruled.

Due to Environmental Pressure Groups, in January 1991, British Coal[5] set out a framework of environmental policies. This framework sets out ways of ensuring that the impact of its operations and activities on the environment is reduced, as far as is practicable. For example Environmental Assessments will be an integral part of the process of bringing forward new opencast sites. It will be interesting to see if this framework operates as stated and they stand by their promises!

The County Council became increasingly concerned at the increased number of applications for opencast mining from the private sector, in recent years. To make these concerns known in January 1991 they launched a new initiative. This included an all party delegation to the Environment Minister and a forum of mineral planning authorities with opencast coal interests to seek action

across the country. The aim of this initiative is to call upon the Secretary of State for the Environment to institute an immediate review of the content of and the application of Mineral Planning Guidance 3; and to agree with other mineral planning authorities how this guidance should be amended. Similar calls for MPG3 to be withdrawn and revised have come from the Coalfield Communities Campaign, the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee and the County Planning Officers Society.

BRITISH COAL'S OPERATIONS WITHIN NORTHUMBERLAND FROM BATES CLOSURE TO THE PRESENT TIME

In 1985/6 3.2 M tonnes of deep mined coal was produced in the Northumberland Coalfield including output from Bates Colliery and Brenkley in Tyne and Wear. At 31 March 1986 there were some 5,500 people employed in deep mining by British Coal in Northumberland.

Ellington Colliery produced 1.97m. tonnes of coal in 1985/6 and had a workforce of 2229 on 31 March 1986. A further 206 employees were engaged in coal preparation and 70 in ancillary activities. It was the most profitable colliery in the coalfield (and now of course the only one left). In 1985/6 it was the only colliery to make a profit.

Whittle Colliery produced 267.00 tonnes of coal in 1985/6. There were some geological difficulties that reduced the output that year. 100 jobs had to go that year. Employment at 31 March 1986 was 745 people and a further 21 people employed in ancillary activities. Whittle closed on 8.1.87. However, it soon re-opened under private ownership. See P.192 "Private Workings."

Ashington Colliery produced 318,000 tonnes of coal in 1985/6. Its colliery workforce at 31 March 1986 was 578 and there were an additional 72 employees in coal preparation and 244 in ancillary activities. Employment at Ashington Workshops at 31 March 1986 was 594 people. Ashington closed on 25.3.88, after one and half centuries of mining, with 350 employees. Some of these employees transferred to Ellington and Ashington Workshops.

THE 1990's

The North East Group of British Coal's deep mine operation comprises the collieries in the Northumberland and Durham coalfield together with the Group Office at Sunderland. Five collieries are in production in 1992; the only one in Northumberland being Ellington. Ashington has one of the two remaining Mine Service Centres in the North East. These are managed separately.

The following Table updates the changes in the deep mining industry for Great Britain, the North East and Northumberland.

DEEP MINING STATISTICS 1960-1991

	1960	1970/1	1980/1	1990/1
Great Britain				
Production (mt)	187	136	110	72.3
Collieries	698	292	211	65
Manpower (000)	602	287	230	57.3
North East Coalfield				
Production (mt)	34	19	14	9.0
Collieries	154	50	25	6
Manpower (000)	121	48	32	8.6
Northumberland				
Production (mt)	11	6.3	4.3	2.1
Collieries	45	16	7	1
Manpower (000)	34	14	9	1.85

(Source: British Coal Corporation)

In 1990/1 Ellington Colliery produced 2.3 million tonnes of coal and had a workforce of 1850. It continues to make substantial operating profits within the present structure of British Coal.

There is much indirect employment dependence on British Coal still, which is difficult to quantify (e.g. Alcan, Blyth Power Station, Blyth Harbour). British Coal expects Ellington to have a long term future.[6]

OPENCAST COAL

There are major opencast sites in Northumberland at Stobswood, East and West Chevington, Chester House, Colliersdean, Linton Lane, Butterwell, Jacks Law and Plenmeller. These are worked by contracting firms on behalf of British Coal Opencast and with the exception of Plenmeller and Jacks Law feeding into disposal points at Butterwell and Widdrington. Plenmeller, in the west of the County, has a rail loading facility at Melkridge. (See Fig. 28).

Employment figures at 31st May, 1991 show that direct employment on these sites in the County totalled some 650 people. These figures are significantly lower than those proposed in the planning applications! The disposal points at Butterwell, Widdrington, Plenmeller, and Bates Staithes employ 64 people and a further 158 are employed as office/management staff.

In 1990/91, 2.4 million tonnes of opencast coal were produced in Northumberland from British Coal sites compared with 3.6 million tonnes in the north east as a whole and 16.2 million tonnes nationally. Production figures for the last 10 years are given in the following table and show that output has been increased during the time when the deep mining sector of the industry has been in serious decline.

Map : Areas Of Interest

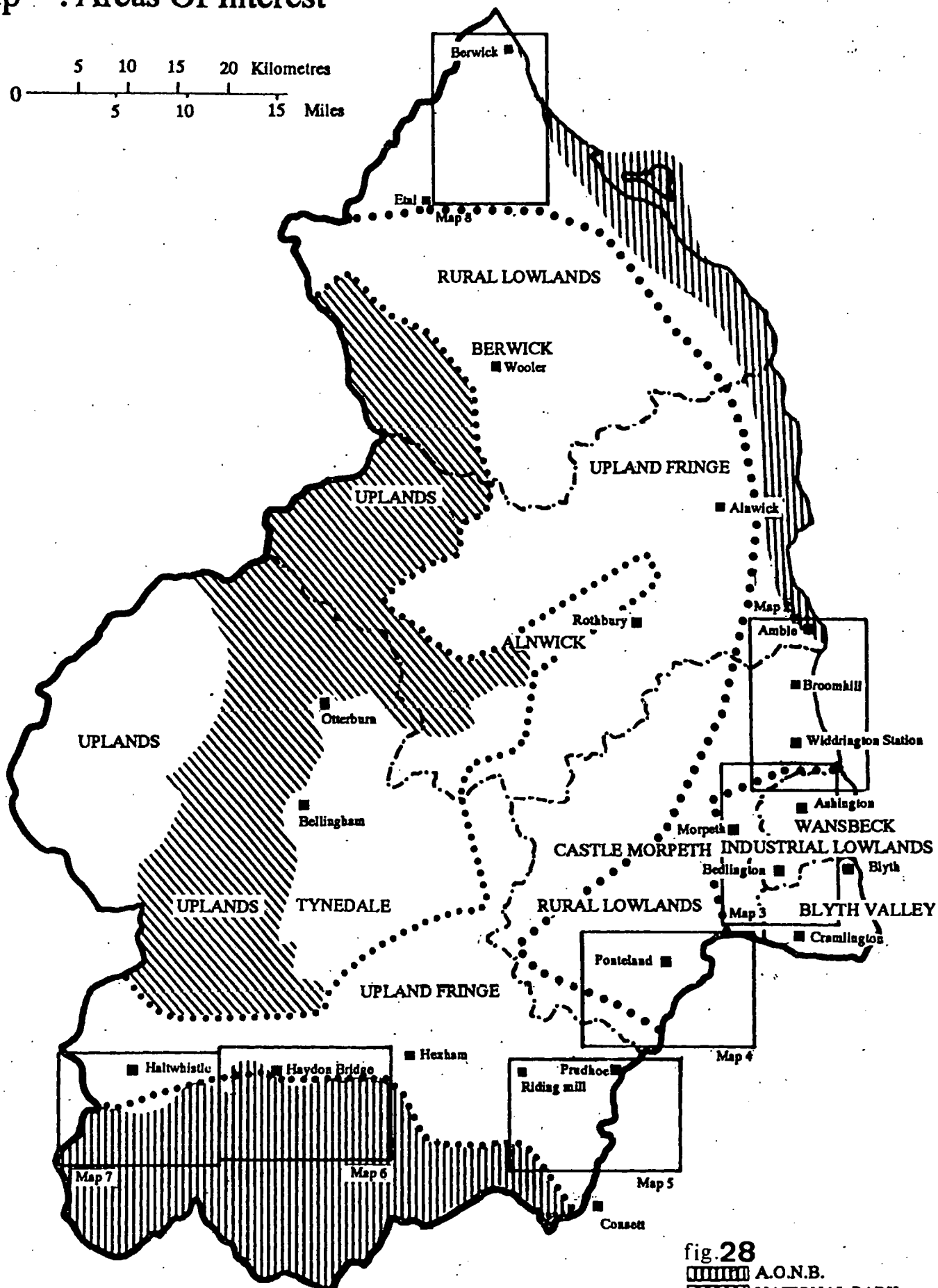


fig.28

A.O.N.B.

NATIONAL PARK

Source: "The Coal Industry in Northumberland"
A Consultation Document 1991

Opencast Coal Production (million tonnes) - excludes Private Sector

Year	UK	North East	Northumberland
1981/82	13.9	3.0	2.1
1982/83	14.4	3.0	2.3
1983/84	13.8	3.1	2.4
1984/85	13.7	2.7	2.0
1985/86	14.1	2.8	2.0
1986/87	12.8	3.1	2.2
1987/88	14.5	3.2	2.4
1988/89	16.1	3.4	2.6
1989/90	16.8	3.5	2.6
1990/91	16.2	3.6	2.4

(Source: British Coal Opencast)

In addition to this there has been a considerable increase in output from private opencast sites.

In 1985/86 private opencast production in Northumberland stood at approximately 50,000 tonnes per annum. In 1988/89 annual production had risen to 143,000 tonnes per annum. "Anticipated annual production for 1991/92 is 250,000."[7] This represents approx. 9% of total county production: a four to five fold increase.

COAL MARKETS: NORTH EAST COALFIELD

The markets for both deep mined and opencast from both British Coal and the private sector in Northumberland, supplies a well-defined set of customers, namely:

The Thames Estuary Power Stations

The Blyth and Yorkshire Power Stations

Industrial customers, notably the Alcan Aluminium Smelter and I.C.I. Wilton.

The household sector.

The amounts of coal being sent to these customers are set out below:

	N.E. Coalfield (m. tonnes)	Northumberland (m. tonnes)
Thames Power Stations	2.1	-
North Power Stations	6.5-8.0	2.5
Alcan	1.2	1.2
Other Industrial	0.8	0.6
Domestic and Other	0.9	0.5
TOTAL	11.5-13.0	4.8

(Source: British Coal Deep Mines)

The future level of these sales is in some doubt. The power generators have made clear their intention to import more coal. National Power and Powergen are contracted to purchase 70 million tonnes from British Coal in 1991/2 and 65 million tonnes in 1992/93. After the expiry of this contract in March 1993, they will almost certainly bid to increase their level

of coal imports. Only the cheapest UK opencast coal can compete in price terms with foreign imported coal. Recently National Power shut two of Blyth B's generating sets at Blyth Power Station, reducing the station's overall capacity by about one third. I.C.I. Wilton is currently constructing a gas power station to commence producing power in 1993. There is a real risk that the I.C.I. market will be lost and this is currently supplied by the Butterwell and Stobswood opencast sites. Alcan has recently "mothballed" 50% of its smelting capacity.

SUMMARY OF NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

The general conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that although open-cast coal production and planning applications are on the increase in Northumberland, (supported and objections over-ruled by Government); there is a great deal of uncertainty concerning the traditional markets for North East coals, and there is more likely to be a decrease than an increase.

The Report concluded that an increased level of opencast coal production does not assist in keeping collieries open.

The future of Blyth Harbour does not depend solely on a high level of coal shipments.

British Coal's opencast coal is not required in large quantities for blending purposes.

Employment levels on opencast sites are significantly reduced.

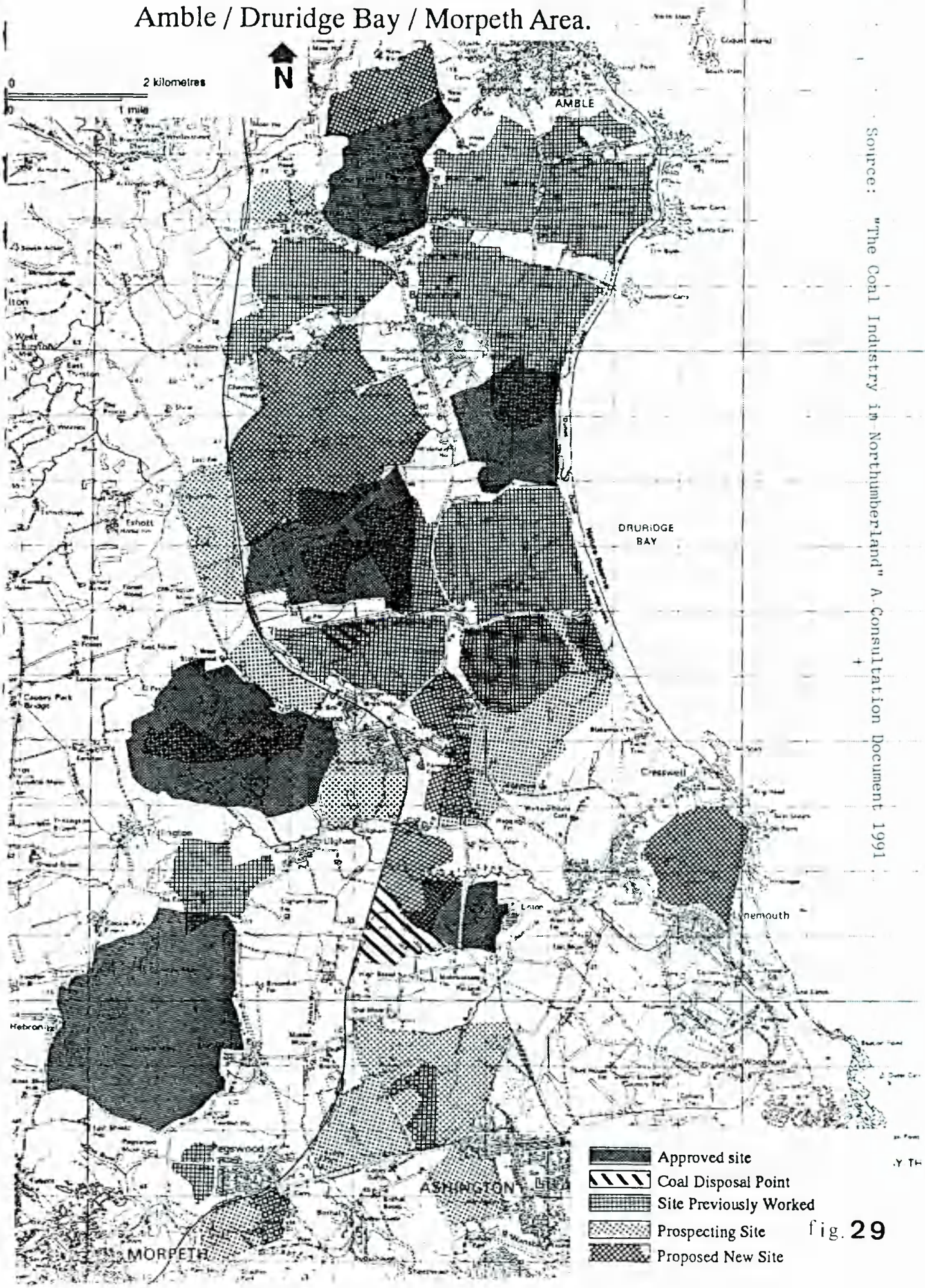
Opencasting has a severe and detrimental effect on communities, landscapes and the economic prosperity of the County.

"The County Council, therefore, considers that there are very strong reasons for resisting the proposed level of opencast production of 2.5 - 3.0 million tonnes per annum. It does not accept that there is any proven need to permit new sites purely to enable existing levels of production to be sustained."

BLYTH

A case in point can be drawn from the Blyth Area once again. Opencast production from Linton Lane site started in 1990 and will be completed by 1995. The site was refused permission by the County Council because it was felt the site was too close to Linton Village. However, the site was granted permission on appeal following a public inquiry. For a change this story has a happier ending and a nature reserve including a water area is being created on the site. The landform and associated works have been carried out by the contractor, and the reserve is being managed by the Northumberland Wildlife Trust. Landscaping proposals and rationalisation of the industrial area adjacent to the village has also been agreed. (See Figs.29 and 30).

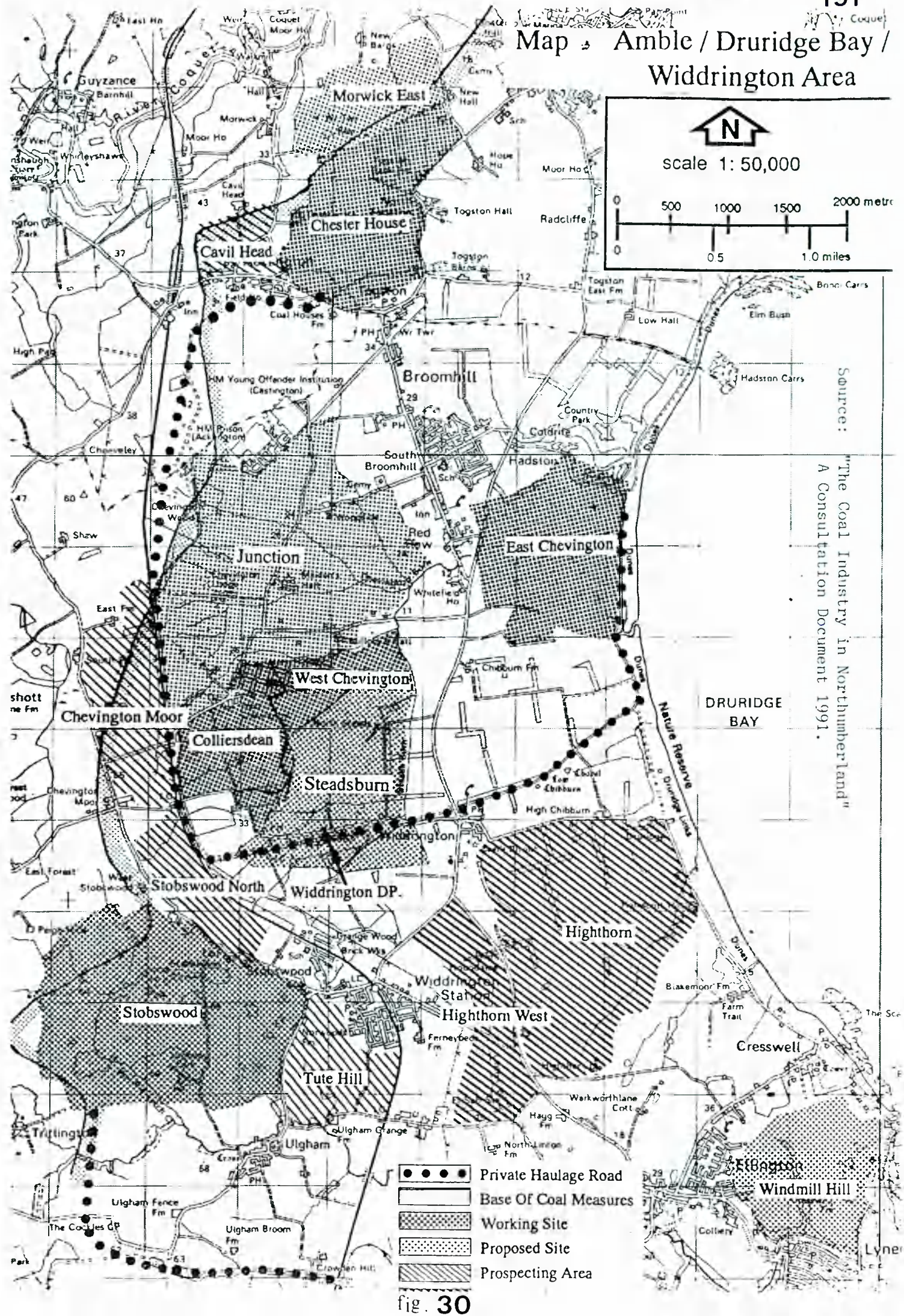
Map British Coal Opencast Sites In The Amble / Druridge Bay / Morpeth Area.



Source: "The Coal Industry in Northumberland" A Consultation Document 1991

fig. 29

Map 3 Amble / Druridge Bay / Widdrington Area



Source: "The Coal Industry in Northumberland" A Consultation Document 1991.

fig. 30

PRIVATE WORKINGS

In addition to British Coal's mines and opencast sites, coal is also worked from private mines and private opencast sites. Both these types of operation are under licence from British Coal. Recent changes in their operating arrangements are set out below:

After receiving planning permission from the County Council, the private operator is required to obtain a licence from British Coal. Under Section 4 of the 1990 Coal Industry Act, the maximum licensable tonnage for a private opencast site was increased from 50,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes.[8] They can also employ 200 men underground instead of 25. The private operator is required to pay a royalty to British Coal on each tonne extracted. This has been reduced from £16 per tonne to £6 per tonne.

In 1990, the electricity supply industry was privatised. National Power and Powergen have changed their commercial practices. It is now part of their strategy to use a mix of competitively priced fuels from diversified sources and to reduce dependence on any one fuel source or supplier.

PRIVATE MINES

There are currently 7 small private mines in the County. These are Ayle and Barhaugh near Alston, Blenkinsopp Castle and Wrytree near Greenhead, Shadfen Park near Morpeth, Tows Bank near Coanwood and Whittle Colliery near

Shilbottle. Hawkhope near Falstone had planning permission but has not yet started working. These mines produce approximately 210,000 tonnes of coal per annum and provide employment for some 200 people.

There are currently five private Opencast sites working in the County. These are Gubeon to the west of Morpeth; Bets Lane near Stannington; Folly House North near Netherwitton; Broomley Fell South of Riding Mill and Lickar Lea near Bowsden. Planning permission has been refused and appeals/public inquiries are pending on 4 new sites. These sites represent a significant increase in interest by private opencast operators in Northumberland.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

In the "News Post Leader" dated 21.5.92 the Country Landowner's Association responded to the Northumberland County Council's Consultation document, discussed above, and stated

> "The association believes the consultation document takes a short-term view of an industry which has served the people of Northumberland for generations. .. .. Rural economy can no longer be supported by agriculture alone. Opencast mining is an alternative source of income for landowners to re-invest in new enterprises and in conservation. We believe the County Council needs to take a much more positive view of the industry which is important to the present well-being and the future of our country". !!!

REFERENCES AND NOTES

CHAPTER TEN

1. BEYNON, Huw
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   SADLER, David
   (1991)
   "A Tale of Two Industries - The Contraction of Coal and Steel in the N.E. of England." P.90 Open University Press.

2. IBID P.33.

3. Memo by the N.C.B. to the Joint Policy Advisory Committee. New Strategy for Coal, October 1985.

4. "The Coal Industry in Northumberland" - A Consultation Document: Northumberland County Council 10.12.1991.

5. Framework Policy on the Environment. British Coal Jan.1991.

6. See (4)

7. IBID.

8. IBID.

CONCLUSION

This Study has told a story of Northumberland and its miners' quest for coal. The development of the coal-field and the development of subsequent communities; men, women and children who were affected by the mine-owners and after 1947, the National Coal Board. The Study linked the historical lifestyle and "occupational" community of the past to the development of community spirit that emerged in a fight to preserve that lifestyle.

The Study demonstrated that historically the fortunes of the coal industry have relied on the whims of successive governments. In the 1950's and 1960's cheap middle eastern oil was the reason for the rundown of the coal industry on "uneconomic" grounds. Nuclear energy was being presented as a 'cheap' source of energy and the Study examines the particular local threat at Druridge Bay and the Campaign that has fought for over ten years to oppose it in Northumberland.

In this industry of coal mining there is a strong sense of community which is rooted into the historical struggles of the past. This was reinforced in the 1984/6 dispute, when the collective endurance of these communities, particularly the women, was amazing.

The fight to "Save Bates Colliery" portrayed the miners and their sympathisers taking on a Tory Government and the might

of their cohort the N.C.B. On Nationlisation Day in 1947 many Collieries literally buried a hatchet when the blue and and white flag was flown. Forty years later, speaking in Durham, Peter Heathfield (National N.U.M.) expressed the feeling that the hatchet had been dug up and buried between his shoulder blades![1] The sense of betrayal and angry emotion that emanated from this fight, shines through when re-examining the material some years later.

The skills of miners are not easily transferrable as they are trained for a specific job. It is extremely unlikely that they found work which had the same traditional significance for them. The Report written for the Campaign by Dr. E. Wade "Coal Mining and Employment - A Study of Blyth Valley (1985) predicted 26% unemployment once Bates had closed. The present unemployment rate taken from the "Employment Gazette"[2] April 1992 and Bridge Street Employment Office in Blyth is

2,891 Male = 16.8%

912 Female = 7.5% Total = 13.3%

The prediction of 26% looks way out of line, until we investigate the Government's redefined calculation of the figures. As from September 1988 new regulations make virtually all people under 18 years of age ineligible for benefit. As from July 1989, redundant miners were given the option of receiving their benefit as part of the redundancy package rather than by signing on!

"Occupational Community" was examined and used as a concept to

define lifestyle in Blyth. Salaman suggests that those involved in these communities acquire their self-image via their occupation. They see themselves and their colleagues only in terms of this "occupational identity" and their shared values and definitions. Ex-miners, whom the author met long after the closure attending a Government Training Course on Social Care (E.T. Scheme) still referred to themselves as "miners". It was interesting that they still used their "marrow" group training with a strong sense of team spirit and used their acute sense of 'possible danger', when transferring these skills to "social care" work in a day-centre for disabled young people who needed much lifting and handling. Salaman also suggests that when occupational changes occur, these are regarded as personal disappointments and provide a source of anxiety. This, he suggests, leads to these members of occupational communities trying to exert some control over their lives by resisting these changes, as the Blyth miners did during their Campaign to keep the pit open. This attempt to obstruct change, Salaman goes on, gives considerable satisfaction. This probably is the case when the challenge is successful, but I suspect, leads to feelings of powerlessness, anger and depression when colossal efforts are thwarted and the Cause fails.

The final chapter on the increase of opencast mining in Northumberland demonstrates that the closure of pits on uneconomic grounds was blatantly political. The purpose being the ultimate privatisation of the larger pits, as declared in the Queen's Speech when the new Tory Government came to power in April 1992. Plus the increase of opencast privately contracted British Coal sites and licenced mines and opencast sites. Northumberland County Council in its discussion

document on Opencast Mining states - (December 1991).

> "Opencasting has a severe and detrimental effect on communities, landscapes and the economic prosperity of the County".

Finally, the "News Post Leader" on 21.5.92 reported

> "Proposals recently under consideration in Brussels would ensure the survival of the majority of Britain's existing coal mines, but Coalfield Community Campaign members are concerned that this will come too late to save the industry."

Certainly, this will be too late to save deep mining in Northumberland. It was not only a decline and rundown of the industry, it was a decimation of a whole way of life.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

CONCLUSION

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"A Tale of Two Industries - The Contraction of Coal and Steel in the North East of England." Open University Press. P.123.

2. "Employment Gazette" - Results of a Labour Force Survey April 1992.

"Unemployment rates are now calculated as a percentage of the estimated total workforce (the sum of employees in employment, unemployed claimants, self-employed, H.M. Forces and participants on work-related government training programmes) and as a percentage of estimates of employees in employment and the unemployed only."

!!!

3. SALAMAN, G. (1975) "Occupations, Community and Consciousness" in "Working Class Images of Society". Ed. Bulmer. M. Routledge and Kegan Paul Pp. 228-231.

EVALUATION AND METHODOLOGY

This thesis was compiled using secondary sources from many different libraries and Northumberland Records Office. The author joined the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers to gain access to their library, and attended several of their "men-only" meetings! The use of socio-economic data, such as census and employment figures was also utilised.

The primary sources were obtained from the Questionnaire returns, and notes taken by the author at the various meetings and conferences described. Interviews with miners were taken on a very informal basis, augmenting the "Comments" section of the questionnaire, when the author was travelling with or talking to miners during the Save Bates Campaign. The questionnaires were devised with Dr. Eric Wade at the beginning of the Study by brainstorming every quantifiable and unquantifiable social and economic effect of closure on the town of Blyth. We used spider diagrams and covered the walls of the office in flip-charts.

The truly "action-research" that took place by myself and Dr. Wade being involved in the Campaign could never again be repeated in a Study of this nature. The main source of this information came from personal observation and the people involved themselves - the people who experienced the closure.

The delay in writing this thesis can be explained by two reasons. Firstly, the depression and low morale experienced by the miners

when Bates Colliery finally closed, rubbed off onto the Researchers and Council Members alike. The emotional response was to "close the book". The wounds were too raw to expose immediately and had to heal with time. Secondly, the author changed occupation and also flirted for a long time with "New Paradigm" Research ideas and thought it feasible to write the thesis in this "genre" using the stories the miners told. However, after protracted deliberations this method of approach was abandoned due to the effective loss of the historical and geological perspectives.

The question of bias is always a problem in research of this nature, and it is probably obvious to the reader where my political leanings lean. However, it is virtually impossible for a researcher to be completely impartial. All of us as individuals have different perspectives on the world, and this must be reflected in our findings to a certain degree. Another problem of which I became aware during this research, is that of marginality. When one is a known observer and can feel deeply about the problems of those being researched - one is involved in the situation, but not part of it. However, this might generate creative insight!

The final writing of this thesis has made me aware of many avenues, follow-ups and tangents that I have not been able to analyse and explore. However, ethnography is about continuous development of ideas and situations and inevitably there are further areas open for examination in the future.

Finally, The National Union of Mineworkers (Northumberland Area)

honoured Dr. Wade and the author by awarding them Honorary Membership of the Branch for their efforts in assisting with the Save Bates Campaign.

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